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IN THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

W. MACNEILE · DIXON ·





CRITICAL ESSAYS

IN THE

REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

BY W. MACNEILE DIXON

M.A., LL.B., LITT.D.

PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND

LITERATURE IN MASON COLLEGE

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TO

THE REV. JOHN GWYNN, D.D., D.C.L.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

WITH THE AFFECTIONATE REGARD

OF THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD, . .	1
THE POETRY OF GEORGE MEREDITH, . .	32
THE POETRY OF THE DE VERES, . . .	64
THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH, . .	119
THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL, ...	166
Χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά, ...	203

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THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

THE king is dead: the great peers of the realm poetic had passed away before him, and there is no head found worthy of the consecrating oil.[1] The critical search-parties that went forth throughout all the land have returned, and report that they have failed to meet with a Saul who stands head and shoulders above his brethren. Meanwhile disaffected persons murmur, and hint at the abolition of the monarchy. Kingship is out of date, and we must set up a poetic republic as we have set up a republic of polite letters. To which it is replied by others, that Nature, to whom we have still to look for our supply of poets, goes about her work in a way that renders futile a revolution with such an end in view. It is said that she produces a poet in the most unlikely spot, in the midst of what appear to be hopelessly uncongenial and blighting circumstances, and at periods incalculable even by the acute physical scientist, who knows all about her movements and designs. And when she has

[1] Written in 1893.

produced him she straightway crowns him; and despite any efforts of the critics to discrown him or crown another in his place, she never fails in retaining the robe and sceptre for the man of her own choice. And the moral is, that it is desirable to discover, as early as may be in each case, these favourites of Nature, and to set the laurel upon their temples; for it is best to be on the side of Nature, seeing that here as elsewhere she is invincible.

However these things be, some of the explorers of these recent search-parties are angry because there is no giant in Israel, and the poets of ordinary stature have been mocked, and otherwise severely handled. It is undoubtedly a grievous thing that they are so many, and yet so diminutive and unimpressive withal; and the fact would in the eyes of the desponding be significant of the degeneracy of the age, if that degeneracy were not, alas! firmly established. The minor poet has indeed always been as much the butt of ridicule as the major poet has been the god—when once his divinity is discovered—in whose honour temples are built and incense-fires kept continually burning. To attempt poetry, and to attain minor poetry, is the unpardonable sin:—

'Mediocribus esse poetis
Non dî, non homines, non concessere columnæ.'

There would be small cause, however, to make a present quarrel with the minor poets, were it not that among them are the high-priests of culture, and there is a suspicion abroad that the evangel of culture, in which we trusted, shows signs of hardening into an unexpansive dogma—into some creed like that of 'art for art's sake,' and that its apostles, in the very intensity of their zeal against Philistinism, have themselves become short of sight and dull of hearing. For the literature that strengthens, or even gladdens, many of us have been out of tune, and have given ear to the poets of culture. Their bower serves as a retreat from the ugly and wearying facts of life, and this although their consolations are oftentimes without hope. Nevertheless it is a pleasantly situated bower. The air is delicate; the moan of doves, and song of nightingales, and ripple and gush of rivulet and waterfall, are on the breeze, and the poet himself makes sweet diversion for us on his lute —it is the most exquisite of artistic performances. But while we recline at ease in the gardens of Boccaccio, the plague still continues to rage in the city. This new Alexandrian school will not serve the needs of humanity. It will not do to divorce poetry from the people, to allow it to become the possession of an aristocratic or an exclusive class. In Elizabethan times, and at

other not unremarkable poetic epochs, the poet was a man among men, who had no need to retire into lifelong seclusion apart from his fellows to pay court to his muse, and it was to the man in the street that he made his appeal. Poetry is the democratic art; it will not do to leave it in the hands of a haughtily exclusive guild of artificers. And for another reason it must not be left in their hands. Their songs, far from being of Tyrtean strain, not only fail to rouse to war, but they even console in defeat; and such music is not conducive to the health of the soul. Too many have been the forces at work in the present century whose resultant has powerfully shaken the natural optimism which supports the human race. Of some who tried courageously enough to accommodate themselves to the new economics, not a few feel that they have taken shelter beneath a tottering wall, for of the new economics we may ask, as of the new creeds of Science, 'Art thou fairer than thy many brethren, or stronger than thy fathers with whom they sleep?' But the pessimistic tide has run strongly in our days, and though the creed of Pessimism is out of date, we are still in a mood of discontent, oppressed by a sense of the futility of life. To encourage this sense is easy—to reconcile us, make us friends again with life, this is a pressing need. We need

'One common wave of thought and joy,
Lifting mankind again';

and we want in poetry 'the rhythms of a courageous and harmonious life.' We want in it likewise not a beauty which may be discovered by 'a certain acute and honourable minority,' but a beauty more affluent which shall illuminate the dull tracts of our daily journeying with an unimagined light, so that we may cross the threshold of the coming century with a buoyant, not with a listless step.

To whom—if we accept Mr. Swinburne's law, 'Nothing which leaves us depressed is a true work of art'—to whom are we to look for these rhythms, for this beauty? For the ideal City of the Future, Plato's suggestion has not yet lost its force. An intolerance of a certain order of poets is to be apprehended. We who are not poets may yet have reason to congratulate ourselves that we have declined to walk without due caution in their narrow footsteps, for we anticipate that there come evil days for the musicians in a minor key who now find favour among us:—

'We are not sure of sorrow,
And joy was never sure,
To-day will die to-morrow;
Time stoops to no man's lure:
And love grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.'

When a poet who writes in this strain presents himself at the august court of the twentieth century, it may hap that he will be treated as Plato recommended :—

'When one of these makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and worshipful being; but we must also inform him that there is no place for such as he in our state—the law will not allow them. And so, when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city. For we mean to employ for our soul's health the rougher and severer poet, who will imitate the style of the virtuous only, and will follow those models which we prescribed at first when we began the education of our soldiers.'

But the future will be sufficient for itself. Meantime it is out of place, perhaps, to rail at the poetry of culture until some other and better wares are offered us. In literature, as in life, the gifts of fortune are to be received with thankfulness, be they small or great. And if we get little but fine jewel-work from his successors, from Arnold, the first poet of culture, the 'prophet of culture,' as he has been ironically styled, we have been the recipients of a truly rich gift; and to him our gratitude will be as lasting as it is pure—to him who was the chief poet of the autumnal season of this century,

the time of the falling of the leaf and the withering of the flower of faith.

With the publication of *The Princess*, Alfred Tennyson became the acknowledged representative of his age in poetry. But it is the Tennyson of the early poems, not the Tennyson of the *Idylls of the King*, who represents the prevailing tone, the prevailing opinions, of his time. In his later years Tennyson did not give himself openly and freely to the predominant current of ideas; he held back, and finally his influence became one making against the predominant current. He came to represent the Conservative party, which clung to its cherished beliefs and traditions; to what we may call the Broad Church party, which, while it acknowledged the authority of Science in its own sphere of work, and the general truth of its teaching, refused to see in that teaching any reason for the abandonment of the old religious position. Tennyson came to be the spokesman of a section that was not the progressive section, but opposed to it—which believed that the latter had gone too far. His mental attitude was that of the men who held that if the old faiths were to live with the new they must be shown to be in harmony; that at first sight they did not seem likely to harmonise, and that an exercise of faith might be necessary—eventually it came to be im-

peratively necessary—for the believer in the creed of Science who was likewise a believer in the creed of the Churches. The consideration of the revelations made by Science filled him at times with misgiving for the revelations of his religion.

Browning's was quite another intellectual temper. He hastened joyfully to embrace truths new and old. There was little need to harmonise new with old; they could not fail to be in harmony if both were indeed truths. One was as precious as the other, and whether their meeting-place was within human sight or not was a matter of little moment.

> 'On the earth the broken arcs, in the heaven the perfect round.'

Matthew Arnold is by contrast the representative poet of the later culture, where that culture parts company with the old beliefs, feels compelled to do so, and bids them a tearful farewell.

If a critic happens to share the opinions to which Tennyson found it possible to remain faithful, he will be apt to think of Arnold's poetical work as the expression of a philosophical creed, and as such to speak of its spiritual weakness. On the other hand, a critic who belongs to Arnold's own school of thought, in matters of religion and art, will incline to dwell almost exclusively upon the technical excellence of his art, the beauty of

its severely classic simplicity, the delicacy and purity of its colour, the instinctive grace of its rhythmic movement, its happy fidelity in rendering English landscape. As typical of these two classes of critics, let us take Mr. Hutton and Mr. Swinburne. It is interesting to notice that Mr. Hutton and Mr. Swinburne both express regret—but for very different reasons—that Arnold's poetry should so constantly sound the note of dubiety regarding things spiritual as they are represented in the creed of Christendom. Mr. Hutton, observing, as he could not easily fail to observe, the air of sadness and disquiet betrayed by the poet in poems dealing with the loss the soul has sustained in the removal of its chief support and consolation, finds in these poems (using the words of Hazlitt) 'the sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty, and the languor of death.' Mr. Swinburne, too, regrets that Arnold should so frequently have given utterance to the pain of uncertainty in spiritual things. 'This alone I find profitless and painful in his work, this occasional habit of harking back and loitering in mind among the sepulchres.' The highest significance of Matthew Arnold's poetry for Mr. Hutton lies in its confession of an unsatisfiable spiritual hunger; its highest significance for Mr. Swinburne lies in its classic excellence as an art-product. 'And everywhere is the one ruling

and royal quality of classic work, an assured and equal excellence of touch.' An impartial critic will prefer to avoid the separation made here, the separation of the two aspects that this, in common with all poetry, presents — the interest of the subject-matter, and the interest of the form. He will be desirous of considering it without unduly untwisting the composing strands—without either (on the one hand) too loudly lamenting its weakness as a moral or spiritual force, or (on the other hand) neglecting the nerve of motive and the nerve of thought which are its real distinction. And he will specially wish to avoid the latter error, because it is one to which modern criticism is prone, and because in the best poetry, in the poetry of Sophocles, of Dante, of Shakespeare, the form is not the chief care of the poet, but the thought that moulds the form, the something that is beyond the reach of the artist, who is merely a finished workman in *technique*.

For this reason not *Sohrab and Rustem*, not *Balder Dead*, nor any of the poems in the classical manner of which Arnold was the advocate, seem to me to possess the same interest—certainly not the same significance—as the lyrics and elegiacs into which ran the stream of his own inner life. He was a poetic artist who studied in the classical school and with consummate success; but if we

wish to find the man in the poetry, it is not to these studies from the antique that we shall turn. And one might go further and say that it is when most himself and least a student of the Greek that even in these poems he takes us captive.

> 'But the majestic river floated on,
> Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
> Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
> Rejoicing through the hushed Chorasmian waste,
> Under the solitary moon :—he flowed
> Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
> Brimming and bright and large : then sands begin
> To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
> And split his currents ; that for many a league
> The shorn and parcelled Oxus strains along
> Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
> Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
> In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
> A foiled circuitous wanderer—till at last
> The longed-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
> His luminous home of waters opens, bright
> And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
> Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.'

Is there not suggested here a pathos other than that declared? It is not Oxus only that is a 'foiled circuitous wanderer'; it is not for Oxus alone that there waits the quiet of a 'home of waters,' tranquil, infinite. Who will fail to recognise the prevailing mood of the poet who held that the secret of life was peace, not joy?

The biography of Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, im-

presses itself upon the reader not only as the life-record of a scholar and noble gentleman but also of a thinker, before whose clearness of vision and steadiness of aim the intellectual difficulties of his time seemed to vanish away. England has possessed among her family of brilliant sons during the present century many of more commanding genius and more splendid gifts; perhaps none whose intellectual sanity more nearly approached the ideal, or whose serene cheerfulness was so admirable. Upon his mind the pressure of problems which disturbed his contemporaries seemed to have no bewildering effect, for, as he himself said, in presence of an insoluble difficulty his mind reposed as tranquilly as in possession of a demonstrated truth. His moral life was at no hour troubled by the suspicion that the struggle cannot avail us, that there is some incurable disease which baffles, and will ever continue to baffle, the most cunning physicians: a germ of evil, the source of all irremediable disorders in the universe as it exists. Or if, indeed, the spectres of the mind did trouble him, they had no power over his spirit to sap its enthusiasm.

'If, in the paths of the world,
Stones might have wounded thy feet,
Toil or dejection have tried
Thy spirit, of that we saw

Nothing—to us thou wast still
Cheerful and helpful and firm!
Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself;
And at the end of the day,
O faithful Shepherd, to come
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.'

To the son of such a father, the temperament that makes the student of life came by right of birth. To live life and to study it are not identical processes: the living are many, the students of life are few, and it is not perhaps too much to say that they are of the elect of Nature, and that no man can be rendered free of that company any more than of the company of the poets save by being born to it: *nascitur non fit.* For every man, as for every student of life, there are centres round which his sympathies cluster; a natural bent of mind is shown by the objects which attract and retain sympathetic attention, and the natural strength of a mind displays itself best at work when concerned with these objects. To inquire of any man, what are his interests? is the shortest way to an estimate of the man. To inquire of a poet, what are his interests, his sympathies? is equally legitimate and efficacious as preliminary to the foundation of any judgment of him, literary or social. Only, in the latter case, the answer cannot (as it may often in the former) be given in a word;

for the sympathies of the poet are likely to be so much wider, and at the same time so much more delicate, that a lengthened inquiry has to be instituted, and a more detailed chart drawn compiled from a longer series of observations and more careful soundings. In the drawing out of such a chart in the present case, Arnold's prose must at times be read side by side with his poetry.

In the forefront of Matthew Arnold's sympathies stands, as it stood in the forefront of the sympathies of the great Rugby schoolmaster and of nearly all the great makers of English literature, his passion for a better practice of life, a more widely diffused rightness of conduct, founded upon self-knowledge and self-control. 'A better practice of life'—yes, surely; but to get at once at the root-principle, it is not in any crusade against vices, general or particular, that the amelioration of social conditions is to be sought, but by the acquisition on the part of each of a purified vision and a cleansed judgment.

'It is of little moment,' we can imagine him saying—using the words of Emerson, whose voice was for Arnold (he tells us) in his Oxford days, 'a clear and pure voice which, for my ear at any rate, brought a strain as new and moving and unforgettable as the strain of Newman or Carlyle or Goethe,' —'It is of little moment,' we can imagine him saying with Emerson, 'that one or two or twenty errors of

our social system be corrected, but of much that the man be in his senses. Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things round him; he has become tediously good in some particular, but negligent or narrow in the rest, and hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result.' Arnold's enthusiasm for reform is not of the popular order. With him the first question is, How of your own temper?—is it serene, under complete control? How of your own judgment?—is it capable of right decision? are there no lurking desires or bias which hamper its efficiency, its precision? The modern crusaders who ride forth in the panoply of war to do battle for a religious or social cause, raise such whirlwinds of dust that they obscure the issues at stake, and the field on which they must be tried—and that field is already obscure with a darkness that may be felt:—

> 'We are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.'

Arnold's moral intensity is the more remarkable as the dogmatic support that morals have had in the past is no longer any support for him, but—as one of Spinoza's propositions puts it, in words which might slip with perfect aptness into one of Arnold's own essays—'even if we did not know that our mind

is eternal, we should still consider as of primary importance piety and religion, and generally all things which we have shown to be attributable to courage and high-mindedness.' It is of vital moment that the man be in his senses; this serves as the keystone to the philosophy of conduct built up for himself and for all who care to join with him in the effort to construct anew a dwelling for the heart and spirit left houseless by the ruin of the home of its ancestral traditions.

This moral intensity, which is in some special degree the birthright of English authors, organises and directs the search for ideas which shall be applicable to conduct, available for life. Facts or ideas which had no direct bearing upon action, which were incapable (in his own phrase) of any immediate 'relation with our sense for conduct or our sense for beauty,' for such facts or ideas he did not care, nor greatly wish to cultivate any appreciation. Hence it was that only that side of philosophy interested him which looked towards ethics, only that side of science interested him of which the facts were of incontrovertible social or moral service. Towards speculative philosophy, as towards purely abstract science, he preserved an attitude of lofty indifference, now and then exchanged for that of a thinly veiled ironical contempt. Here lies the true secret of Spinoza's attraction for him, not easily

missed by the reader of Arnold who has even a superficial acquaintance with the work of the great Jewish thinker. Spinoza cuts short the purely speculative part of his philosophy, compresses the metaphysical inquiry into brief space, and lays the emphasis, the real stress, on his ethical deductions, giving to the whole system the title 'Ethics.' This fact, and the fact that Spinoza's ethics are neither more nor less than the ethics of Stoicism, after the pattern of whose 'wise man' (ὁ σοφός) Arnold desired to form himself; these, to which we may add the admiration of a disciple for a master, in that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was the first work to apply the principles of rationalistic interpretation to the Jewish Scriptures—these are the sufficient reasons for the elevation of Spinoza by Arnold to the supreme seat among philosophers. The canonisation is in the characteristic dogmatic vein. 'The lonely precursor of German philosophy, he still shines when the light of his successors is fading away; they had celebrity, Spinoza has fame.' In the judgment of one who cherished this slight respect for the pure idea, we may anticipate that it will go hard with Plato, and the verdict is a verification of our conjecture. Here is a quotation made with full approbation from Joubert:—'Plato loses himself in the void, but one sees the play of his wings, one hears their rustle. . . . It is good to

breathe his air, but not to live upon him.' For the same reason Arnold was never in touch with Shelley, that brilliant transgressor into the field of pure abstractions. Shelley too was in the void (the figure is borrowed from Joubert's), 'a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain.' Or again, Marcus Aurelius, had he known the Christian writings, would have 'found in the Gospel of St. John, which has leavened Christendom so powerfully, too much Greek metaphysics, too much *gnosis*'; and we may assume that the real worth of the reflections of the Roman Emperor lies in their practical efficacy, in their richness of suggestion for the government of daily life. The utilitarian spirit which has gone so far to determine the English racial type, which has dominated the counsels political, religious, and social of the nation, and made the Englishman the most successful practical man of affairs the world has ever seen, has, nevertheless, severely circumscribed the sphere of his mental energy. It has denied to the race, as it denied to the Roman, any philosopher of the first rank; while in Berkeley despised Ireland was the mother of a son who takes rank with Plato as a primate in the hierarchy of thought as well as a master of style.

'All good poetry, all good literature, is a criticism of life,' said Arnold; and it is true of his own poetry

that it is such. Whether there may or may not be good literature other than this we need not stay to question. The poetry of Matthew Arnold, genuine poetry, is a criticism of life. Take as typical perhaps the most perfect of his poems, the lyric *To Marguerite*, beginning

'Yes! in the sea of life enisled.'

With what fidelity to human emotion does he here express that sense of solitariness that accompanies individuality, with what pathos invest it, with what subtle beauty shape it to a 'lyrical cry'! But critical it is, nevertheless; a delineation of the conditions of life, a judgment upon them.

'Who ordered that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cooled?
Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God, their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.'

To the critic the universe presents itself as a problem, or a series of problems; and as long as he can look on them impersonally, as he might on a proposition in the pure mathematics, he may exercise his intellect without feeling that his will is in any degree strengthened or impaired, his sorrows deepened, or the fountains of his joy dried up. But the critic who joins to his critical faculty the temperament of the poet

is in no such happy case. He hangs upon the answers which are returned to his anxious questionings as upon words which, issuing from a final tribunal, make for life or death. Born into a critical period which had few fresh vital forces to arouse or sustain it, Arnold, while he preserved his zeal for high moral standards, became the prey of an unquiet mind. The restless century of his birth transformed him, sensitive as he was, too sensitive to remain unimpressed by it. Had he been less of a poet he might have escaped its influence; but the prevailing scepticism of the age, the atmosphere of doubt, of uncertainty, of anxiety, of fever, took from him the natural self-sufficingness, the inner dependence, which of all the gifts of health he felt to be the most precious. And throughout his poetry, expressive as it is of the longing for the spirit of the Greek life, a cheerful 'Stoic Epicurean acceptance' of things as they were, and a real delight in the environment thus acquiesced in, with all its longing for the spirit that was never sick or sorry—throughout his poetry there are few indications of the attainment of that serener air. When the note of its profoundest conviction falls upon our ears, it has far other sound:—

'Ah love, let us be true
To one another, for the world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.'

In some sense a Greek born out of due season, Arnold was yet far separated from the Greek temper. May not a student go further and say that the scholars who have discovered the classic tone in his poetry have been misled by the classic cast, the simplicity, of its diction, into the belief that his kinship with the Greek is a close and vital one? The kinship is, I think, in reality superficial and slight. What were the motives of the poetry of the Attic stage, taking it as representative of Greek poetry in general? There is nothing more distinctly marked in Æschylus, in Sophocles, or in Euripides, than the simplicity and directness of the central motive, and the absence of secondary motives. There is nothing more characteristic of Arnold's poetry, as of all modern poetry, than the complexity of its motive—it is the battle-ground of varied and conflicting emotions, thoughts, passions. The analysis of the *Weltschmerz*, the world-pain which broods over modern life, and throws it into shadow, beside which the Greek life is bright with sunshine, this analysis is altogether foreign to classic art. Take another point. Arnold turns to Nature for a season of consolation. In her dispas-

sionate calm he finds an anodyne for the hurrying fever of the soul—a conception so modern as to be almost new to ourselves, and one which never crossed the mind of a Greek poet, to whom Nature (at most) supplies the landscape in his background —a simple and slightly sketched landscape, while as in real life the figures of men occupy and animate the foreground.

One idea, however, a central idea in the developed philosophy we owe to Greece, Arnold seems to make his own. In his revolt from the intense individualism of modern ethics, in his desire to render up his own private, partial, and narrow life for the universal, wide, and elemental movement of the whole, to receive the spirit and join in the order of the Cosmos, to enter thus into the great harmonic progression of the living All, which is the interpretation of the maxim ζῆν κατὰ φύσιν—here he is more of a Greek thinker than elsewhere:—

'"Ah, once more," I cried, "ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew;
Still, still let me as I gaze upon you
Feel my soul becoming vast like you!"

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
In the rustling night air came the answer,
"Wouldst thou *be* as these are? *Live* as they."

"Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,

These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

"And with joy the stars perform their shining,
And the sea its long moon-silvered roll;
For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul."'

A critic of life, he could not fail to recognise its pathos, and the sense of its pathos intensified the sympathy with which as fellow-sufferer he thought of those to whom the same dark suspicions had come home, and the same ague of the mind with its alternate chills and fever had been a close companion; and especially did his heart go out to those fugitives from life who, no longer able to endure the world's tempestuous and treacherous weather, had sought refuge in the eternal haven of death, or in some unvisited bay of isolated seclusion. It is impossible during a distracted youth to look forward to age and think it a blessing, as Sophocles thought it. Age, which the 'singer of sweet Colonus' congratulated himself upon reaching, because it delivered him from the impatient passions that agitate early life, carrying it hither and thither without fixity of purpose—in age Arnold puts no confidence. To grow old is

'To spend long days
And not once feel that we were ever young.'

He anticipates that when youth is past, its hurry-

ing fever, as he looks back upon it, will seem generous fire, and he will awake to the conviction that one thing only has been given

'To youth and age in common—discontent.'

The want of accord, the estrangement between mind and soul, has been the experience of some of the rarest and loveliest characters whose birth-lot had fallen in untoward places; and with them Arnold felt himself bound by indissoluble and sacred links of moral and intellectual kinship. A great part of his poetry is occupied with setting forth in his own person, or in the persons of these brethren in spirit, as in *Obermann* or *The Sick King at Bokhara*, the various phases of the sad estate in which the soul—

'A wanderer between two worlds—one dead,
The other powerless to be born'—

is never quite possessed. In such estate the pursuits of the world, the acquisition of power, the happiness of love, are adjudged vain by one

'Who needs not love and power to know
Love transient, power an unreal show.'

The setting forth of this mood in the poetry of Matthew Arnold is so elaborate and careful, so marked by precision, that it will be preserved and

studied as a permanent record of the reign in this century of a distinctive spirit—the poetry of imaginative and spiritual regret.

The strain is one which could not in the nature of things be heard in classic poetry with the same piercing clearness and pathetic power. The imperative questions respecting his destiny and duties put with ever fresh insistence to each new arrival on the world's stage, have a vastly more incisive force when they come to one who has dwelt for a season in restful quiet under the protecting wings of a revealed religion, and rudely awaken him from the sense of an everlasting security. Neither to Greek nor to Roman, whose gods were made in the likeness of men, and whose hopes for the future were as dim as the shadow-land the poets feigned for the ghosts of the departed, did the spiritual questions come with such power to wound as when for the child of a Christian race they bring in their train an inextinguishable regret for a beautiful and lost faith, and a yearning after the sweet yet passionate summons to an ideal of life of which that faith was the fostering parent. But although in the life of the modern world there was no task which a spirit such as Arnold's could take upon it with genuine enthusiasm, to escape from the life of 'the madman or the slave' some effort was imperative. The question comes to be asked,

What is to take the place of the sustaining faith that is gone? The question is answered, directly in his prose, touched with emotion in his verse. The Best may indeed be denied him; 'the joyful emotion to make moral action perfect' is no longer possible; it can be reached only by rare souls: but the 'Second Best,' an impulse relatively inferior indeed but nevertheless sustaining, may be his—

> 'An impulse from the distance
> Of his deepest, best existence
> To the words Hope, Light, Persistence
> Strongly sets and truly burns.'

Thus bracing ourselves to endure we may renew the battle, and as while the Palladium stood Troy could not fall, so with us whose Palladium is the soul:—

> 'Then we shall rust in shade or shine in strife,
> And fluctuate 'twixt blind hopes and blind despairs,
> And fancy that we put forth all our life,
> And never know how with the soul it fares.
>
> Still doth the soul from its lone fastness high,
> Upon our life a ruling effluence send,
> And when it fails, fight as we will, we die;
> And while it lasts, we cannot wholly end.'

This is the poetic statement of the ethics of a humanised Stoicism. And it is to the Stoic philosophers and to the Stoic code that the thinker whose ethical fervour has not suffered eclipse, has

survived the parting from a dogmatic creed, and whose loss of a divinely revealed religion only intensifies his longing for a high-pitched scheme of conduct—it is to Seneca, to Epictetus, and to Marcus Aurelius, of all the philosophers the nearest in spirit to the Christian saints, that he naturally turns. Of the systems that claim no supernatural sanction, Stoicism is the nearest akin to Christianity. Its appeal to Arnold was necessarily powerful; and Marcus Aurelius is first favourite because he supplies something of that 'very sentiment whence Christian morality draws its best power.' Stoic morals touched with sentiment will go far to support the traveller through the weary ways of life; and for its pains he may find also certain consolations, remedies, anodynes. Not that any of these will supply the glow, the sense of security, the holy joy of the saint, but they will serve to lift heart and mind into a serener sphere of existence. These consolations and remedies for the pains of life do not consist in passionate effort such as that which Browning counsels:—

> 'Then welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
> Be our joy three parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!'

Nor are they to be experienced, as with Tennyson,

in the contemplation of a blessed far-off consummation towards which the whole creation moves. Arnold felt that these consolations and remedies were breathed from the dispassionate calm, the orderly perfection and loveliness of Nature, that they entered and for a little time gave ease to the heart from the contemplation of the highest reaches of human art, and that they were abundantly present in the deliverance of his own soul in his poetry. Various has been the teaching of the prophets of the century: Carlyle's, a fire-eyed defiance of the 'Everlasting No,' and a devotion to the work nearest one's hand; George Eliot's, a determined bracing of the moral sinews though without hope or joy; Arnold's, that consolation may be derived from Nature, from beauty, and from art. And the subjects of his own poetry are thus determined. They are such as in poetic treatment will best relieve his own overstrained feelings, such as will 'ease his wound's imperious anguish.' Thus it comes that, take what form they may, his poems are transcripts of his own emotional moods. Throughout his poetry—to recall his own fine phrase spoken of Byron, he bears 'the pageant of his bleeding heart.'

To escape from the enfeebling mood, he turns to Nature. Take this from *Empedocles on Etna*, when he passes from critical efforts to appraise and weigh the value and the issues of existence, to bathe

his spirit in divine light and air, in the wells of sovereign and unceasing beauty :—

> 'Far, far from here,
> The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
> Among the green Illyrian hills; and there
> The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
> And by the sea, and in the brakes
> The grass is cool, the sea-side air
> Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
> More sweet and virginal than ours.'

Of the class of poems in which he turns to Nature for consolation, *Thyrsis* will serve as the best example. Here the elegiac strain softly dies away into the tender sweetness of the soothing music that celebrates some morn in early June before the roses and the longest day; or the high midsummer pomps, the roses that shine afar down the alleys, the lattices jasmine-muffled :—

> 'So, some tempestuous morn in early June,
> When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,
> Before the roses and the longest day—
> When garden-walks and all the grassy floor
> With blossoms red and white of fallen May
> And chestnut flowers are strewn—
> So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry
> From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees
> Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze :
> *The bloom is gone and with the bloom go I.*
>
> Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go?
> Soon will the high midsummer pomps come on,
> Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,
> Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,

Sweet William with his homely cottage smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow.
Roses that down the valleys shine afar,
And open jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening star.'

Arnold's gospel according to Nature is not Wordsworth's. While both poets are lovers of Nature, and join in her matins and vespers, her litanies, her festivals of spring and summer, they worship her each in a different spirit. In no poem of Arnold's is to be heard the pure note of joy; he is the poet of a nation's elegiac mood. The consolations of Nature that are to him so soothing, so indispensable, are the whispers of her peace, the hushing effluence of her calm; while to Wordsworth Nature is the source of rapture, of passionate delight, of inexpressible thrills of joyous ecstasy. To Arnold she is the consoling mother whose gracious countenance and winning sympathy soothes, steals away the sharpness of his pain. To Wordsworth she is much more than this: his teacher, his constant companion, sharer and source of joy as well as friend. In the one case we have palliative remedies for the fever of the mind; in the other a power of renovation and a stimulus, assistance in health as well as in disease. Wordsworth's healing power arises from this, that, like Shakespeare, he discovers 'a joy in widest commonalty spread,' and (what is

still harder to find) 'joys that spring out of human suffering.' To become a Wordsworthian, one must be born again; to read the poetry of Arnold with pleasure, we need not again become children. It will soothe us in unrest for a time; while if we learn the secret of the elder poet, we shall enter into possession of a peace that cannot be disturbed.

Of Arnold himself what shall we say as last word? How better or more truly can we think of him than as he himself taught us to think of the high-hearted Roman Emperor with whose inner life of thought and feeling he had so much in common?

'We see him just, wise, self-governed, tender, thankful, blameless; yet with all this, agitated, stretching out his arms for something beyond—

Tendentemque manus ripae ulterioris amore.'

THE POETRY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

WHAT distinguishes Mr. Meredith among living writers is not so much his possession of this or that quality, the intensity and variety of his sympathies, the power or peculiarity of his style: it is that in an era of talent, in an era in which we may be said to suffer from a plethora of talent, his work is so unmistakably beyond the reach of talent, so far, too, beyond the reach of labour added to ambition and desire—it is so obviously the work of genius. Readers of Mr. Meredith's novels long ago discovered in him the man with the key to a new garden of romance, which matched the best-loved of old, to a new gallery in art, whose portraits might hang unabashed beside those of the old masters. From a little clan the readers of his prose have grown into an army; but as for the readers of his verse, these may even now easily be numbered. Yet it is not beyond possibility—though the Meredith of to-day is indisputably the novelist—that the Meredith of the twentieth century may be the poet. 'All novels in every language,' said De Quincey, 'are

hurrying to decay'—a judgment not without a germ of truth. Posterity, at all events, if one may venture to predict the future from the present—will possess a considerable body of literature of its own, and will be necessarily impatient, as the present generation is impatient, of surplusage and bulk in the literature of the past; will do honour to the works of justest proportions, and harbour prejudices in favour of beauties apparent at first sight, and of excellence displayed in narrow ground. And in some sense poetry is excellence displayed in narrow ground, prose cleared of the superfluous, transfigured prose, the sublimated essence; its precious sentiment close-packed and embalmed for a long journey down the stream of Time.

It cannot be said of Mr. Meredith that no writer of his century has challenged the like serious attention in the field of poetry as well as of fiction. To leave a great name—that of Scott—out of account, there are other and not inconsiderable rivals. But Mr. Meredith has achieved a strikingly uniform success, such a success as makes it difficult to place his prose above his poetry, or his poetry above his prose, without misgivings that the verdict may be reversed by the critical court of the later generations. One thing is indisputable and noteworthy; Mr. Meredith's verse bears a very close relationship

to his prose—it supplements, reinforces, and interprets his prose. Essentially a dramatic artist, he has none the less experienced the lyrical passion for the deliverance of his own soul, and in his verse has set free his thought in his own person. It is precisely the dramatic artist entering through his imaginative sympathy into the characters and situations of his *dramatis personæ* who presents 'the imaginary utterances of so many imaginary persons, not his,' and suppresses himself the while; it is precisely the dramatic artist, we may naturally suppose, in whom the impulse towards self-revelation exists most strongly. He is the wide and clear-eyed spectator of life who sees and pictures it best, but is, for the most part, content to remain unknown behind his creations. And in Mr. Meredith's fiction, as in Shakespeare's, a persistent and impenetrable irony veils the artist himself; the author lurks undiscovered behind the humorist. So was it not with Thackeray, who steps forward ever and anon to speak *in propria persona.* So was it not with Scott, whose sympathies there is no mistaking. Shakespeare in his sonnets, the popular theory has it, laid aside the mask of humour, and 'with the sonnet-key unlocked his heart.' Let this be so or not, it is certain that Mr. Meredith lays aside in his verse the mask of humour worn in his novels. His poetry is more essentially serious

than his prose; it is grave almost throughout; a personal utterance, the expression of the philosophy of the individual. The reader of the novels is in contact with the dramatic artist, the spectator and the student of life; the poems are the outspoken utterance of the man who is himself one of the *dramatis personæ* in personal relation with the facts of the world. Taken together, this prose and this verse constitute an autobiography—the outlook and the inlook are comprised in it. To Mr. Meredith's poetry belongs therefore a special, because a near and personal, interest; it supplements his prose, as has been said, and stands to it somewhat in the relation of interpretative criticism. Not the ignoble curiosity which pries into the private life of an author, but a legitimate intellectual curiosity is here satisfied. One is grateful to possess the individual view of so ardent and so brilliant a student of life, especially if, as in Mr. Meredith's case, no discord is introduced into the harmony of the entire impression received from his work. And it may be broadly stated that the predominant note in Mr. Meredith's work as a whole, both prose and verse, is its invincible fortitude, its cheerful acceptance of things as they are. He belongs to that company of artists who have looked the world in the face, and expressed neither disappointment nor dissatisfaction therewith. In an epoch in which

poets are neither few nor insignificant, Mr. Meredith shares with Browning the distinction that he has never for the briefest season dwelt in the melancholy shade. Here is poetry in which prevails no sense of sadness, no overpowering sentiment of pity for the vexed human race, no Virgilian cry with its sense of tears in mortal things, no wistful regrets, no torturing doubts. Even so interesting and so great a writer as Count Tolstoi suffers at times a sense of hopelessness to overcome him, and involves us in his own despair. But Mr. Meredith's citadel of mind and heart is impregnable, and, while he will have us see the naked truth, he fortifies us for its reception. In this poetry there is ever scant sympathy dispensed for weak nerves and apprehensive hearts. Read *Earth and Man*, or this *Whimper of Sympathy*:—

'Hawk or shrike has done this deed
Of downy feathers: rueful sight!
Sweet sentimentalist, invite
Your bosom's Power to intercede.

So hard it seems that one must bleed
Because another needs will bite!
All round we find cold Nature slight
The feelings of the totter-knee'd.

O it were pleasant, with you
To fly from this tussle of foes,
The shambles, the charnel, the wrinkle!
To dwell in yon dribble of dew
On the cheek of your sovereign rose,
And live the young life of a twinkle.'

'Part of the best of a great literatus,' said Whitman, 'shall be the absence in him of the idea of the covert, the lurid, the maleficent, the devil, the grim estimates inherited from the Puritans, hell, natural depravity, and the like. The great literatus will be known among us by his cheerful simplicity, his adherence to natural standards, his limitless faith in God, his reverence, and by the absence in him of doubt, ennui, burlesque, persiflage, or any strained or temporary fashion.'

How luminous a saying—but how shattering to the pretensions of the majority of our *literati*! The *absence* of doubt, ennui, burlesque, persiflage, or any strained or temporary fashion! Yet it is thus Mr. Meredith may be known among his contemporaries as the great literatus; by his cheerful simplicity, his adherence to natural standards, his limitless faith in God, and by the absence in him of doubt and ennui. And this though we have passed and are passing through times unfavourable to literature possessed of these qualities: times whose spiritual winds are chill, and whose skies grey with the greyness of the sea in winter. Too surely the modern world is not all that it was expected to be; it has disappointed expectation, and we moderns have reaped from it a plentiful crop of discouragement. Since the Renaissance—that birthday of the modern world—brought with it a sense of buoyancy, of widening horizons, and incalculable advances, and endless triumphs for

humanity, only a poet here and there has been a minister of hope and promised great things in a day that was not very far off. These eager spirits on the watch-towers of thought saw, or thought they saw, the breaking light of some great morning of the world—a light that was about to fill the heavens and orb into humanity's perfect day. Wordsworth and Coleridge had these purple visions in youth, but the disillusioning years dealt hardly with them. Shelley could not bring himself to believe that the light that filled his own soul did not shine in the open sky. But we of the modern world do not suffer from these illusions, and the happy enthusiasts among us who put their trust in the progress of Science seem also to suffer from disillusion. They are reluctantly brought to confess that while Science has given liberally to humanity with one hand, she has taken away with the other. While, however, the majority of the latter-day poets have felt the absence of inspiring motives in the atmosphere of the time, Mr. Meredith breathes the keen disillusioning air without pain and without discouragement, and declares it to be spiritually bracing. The season is autumn, and the grey mist

> 'Narrows the world to my neighbour's gate;
> Paints me Life as a wheezy crone. . . .
> I, even I, for a zenith of sun

Cry, to fulfil me, nourish my blood:
O for a day of the long light, one!'

But here is the last word:—

'Verily now is our season of seed,
Now in our Autumn; and Earth discerns
Them that have served her in them that can read,
Glassing, where under the surface she burns,
Quick at her wheel, while the fuel, decay,
Brightens the fire of renewal: and we?
Death is the word of a bovine to-day,
Know you the breast of the springing To-be?'

The majority of the poets seek refuge when the psychological climate of the times is unfavourable to poetry, in the limitless romance of the past. Not so Mr. Meredith. He is a poet of a *sæculum realisticum*, and the only romance for him is the real romance of the present, the inexhaustible romance of the future. The poetry with the passion for the past, the poetry that would hang its richly wrought arabesque in gold and purple between us and the facts of life, has here given place to the poetry with an undivided allegiance to the present, and to truth palatable or unpalatable. Goldsmith—that tender, human-hearted poet—wrote of his favourite books as being those which, amusing the imagination, contributed to ease the heart, and in another of his exquisite sentences defined the office of the poet-sage: 'Innocently to amuse the imagination in this dream of life is wisdom.' The wisdom of

Mr. Meredith's poetry is made of sterner stuff. If we are to be cradled in comfortable philosophies, transcendental or mystical, lapped in soft Lydian airs, or borne in a car of song by the instinct of sweet music driven, we must read poetry other than this. And Mr. Meredith declines, too, the sad task in which Matthew Arnold engaged, the task of 'sweeping up the dead leaves fallen from the dying tree of faith.'

> 'These are our sensual dreams;
> Of the yearning to touch, to feel
> The dark Impalpable sure,
> And have the Unveiled appear.'

Poetry such as this, devoid of the sentiment of regret, devoid of that tender melancholy so characteristic of Matthew Arnold; almost devoid, too, of the sentiment of pathos; which seems to shun the elegiac sentiment in which so much of the world's poetry is steeped, and by which it makes its appeal; poetry like this strikes a strange and original note. The chords to which Mr. Meredith trusts for his effects are chords seldom heard upon the lyre; his is a poetry of almost exclusively intellectual interest—the music from an iron string. It is not to be expected that this poetry should give us the full sense of vitality as Chaucer gives it, of the mere joy of living, or charm us to dreamful ease as Spenser charms.

'He who has looked upon Earth
Deeper than flower and fruit
Loses some hue of his mirth.'

But poesy has an infancy, an adolescence, an immortality Protean. Mr. Meredith's is not the buoyant spirit of Chaucer, but the virtue of his poetry resides none the less in its astonishing vitality and in the power to communicate that vitality. To the freshness and buoyancy it possesses is added a flavour of intellectual bitter that springs from its devotion to reality, and it is by reason of its rarely mingled elements, its freshness and buoyancy, and its strenuous devotion to reality, that Mr. Meredith's poetry achieves a new poetic triumph.

'I am certain,' said Keats of his own *Lamia*, 'I am certain that there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way—give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation.' The poetry of Mr. Meredith, too, is not negligible; it has that sort of fire in it which takes hold of one, and gives him either a pleasant or unpleasant sensation. This is verse that will not suffer a reader to pass by in peace, and, if it makes not music for him, he will, with Hotspur, prefer to hear the dry wheel grate on the axle-tree.

'Square along the couch, and stark,
Like the sea-rejected thing
Sea-sucked white, behold their king
Attila, my Attila! . . .

Him, their lord of day and night,
White, and lifting up his blood
Dumb for vengeance. Name us that,
Huddled in the corner dark,
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Teeth for lips! 'Tis she! She stares,
Glittering through her bristled hairs.
Rend her! Pierce her to the hilt!'

Discriminating readers of Mr. Meredith's novels have no doubt felt the presence of the poet even in his garment of prose, but probably few suspect that the poet preceded the novelist. His first public appearance was with a volume, published in 1851, simply entitled *Poems*, and dedicated to his father-in-law, Thomas Love Peacock. It was not until some years later that he took the field with a novel, *The Shaving of Shagpat*. The second volume of Poems appeared in 1862 (three years after *Richard Feverel*), *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads*; the third, *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, in 1883; the fourth, *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life*, in 1887; the fifth, *A Reading of Earth*, in 1888; the sixth, *The Empty Purse and other Poems*, in 1892. Of these the first volume is now a rare treasure, more especially as the author has not cared to reprint his *Juvenilia*; and the second contains, besides many verses never reprinted, the original *Modern Love*, which was

selected by the author for republication accompanied by some new poems as a separate volume in 1892.

The best order in which first to read Mr. Meredith's poetry is not, I think, the chronological order. If one begins with *A Reading of Earth*, and passes to the remaining volumes by way of the *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, one moves more easily, receives a more continuous, a more unbroken impression, and enters at once into sympathy with the attitude of the author. And Mr. Meredith's attitude, his choice of subject, and his method require to be acquiesced in—'not to sympathise is not to understand.' A poet commonly places himself *en rapport* with his audience by his choice of subject or by the adoption of a familiar method, and he is accustomed as artist to retire to a distance from his work and to contemplate its effect from a point of view not entirely his own. He has during the creative process his audience in his eye. If he is unable or unwilling to gain this remoteness from his own creation, if he decline to place himself either by choice of subject or by the adoption of a familiar method at the universal point of view, he demands an unusual intellectual activity from his readers, and wins his way with them certainly more gradually, perhaps not at all. Approval of his choice of subject,

approval of his method, are not assured him until it be granted that the effect has justified the means. For a law of parsimony holds in art: the old methods are sealed by acceptance, and a new, if not successful, is an impertinence.

The *onus probandi* rests with such a poet to show good reason for his departure from accredited poetic example. The progress of Wordsworth through ridicule to fame was the progress of a poet of determined independence in choice of subject as well as in poetic methods. Yet opposition once overcome, it is the poet with the note of strangeness in his voice to whom we return—the note of strangeness is the note of individuality. In poetry, too, as in all art, there is a compromise effected, and the note of strangeness is the mark of the fresh compromise, the alteration of balance effected by the new method, the new choice of subject. Or rather let us say that with the original poet a novel aspect of things is brought into the foreground, a new predominant purpose is displayed. With Tennyson the main purpose was to bend his language to his thought so that no verse should escape him unenriched by a musical cadence, that no arrow unfeathered with melody should leave his bow. With Mr. Meredith the main purpose is achieved if no line, no phrase escape him uninformed by force, if he discharge no shaft unwinged

or unweighted with thought. Hence obscurity is the charge brought against him; he has been called an inarticulate poet, and doubtless he is at times obscure. But like Browning's, Mr. Meredith's obscurity arises out of the number and fervency of his ideas; he is obscure because he has so much to say, and is in such haste to say it, and moreover insists upon his own point of view and demands from his reader that flexibility of intelligence, that intellectual activity, necessary to the appreciation of an unfamiliar poetic method. And obscurity is, after all, the vaguest of charges. Gray was accounted obscure; Shelley intolerably obscure; Tennyson, even our popular Tennyson, in the days of his early triumphs was censured for his obscurity. And if the readers of Browning are content to travel far, and at times even with lagging step, to catch sight of splendours such as this:—

'I shall keep your honour safe;
With mine I trust you, as the sculptor trusts
Yon marble woman with the marble rose,
Loose on her hand, she never will let fall,
In graceful, slight, silent security'—

then the readers of Mr. Meredith may well be content to undergo occasional mental fatigue for the sake of, let us say, such a magnificent *Meditation under Stars* as this:—

'We who reflect those rays, though low our place,
To them are lastingly allied.

So may we read, and little find them cold:
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.
The fire is in them whereof we are born;
The music of their motion may be ours.
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.
Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.
Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face:
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;
Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.'

It may freely be granted that in general we have too continuous a strain, too unrelieved an emphasis in Mr. Meredith's poetry. It lacks breathing-spaces, points of repose for the imagination. Once we have ascended his poetic car we are borne along at full speed, a speed that is rarely slackened until the goal be reached. Thus it comes that one cannot read for long in these volumes, as in Tennyson's; one cannot fleet the time carelessly with this poet as with Mr. William Morris. Mr. Meredith is not of the singers who simply say the most heart-easing things, who lead us to their favourite haunts by wood or stream, and discourse music to us that we may drink oblivion of care and pass into a many-coloured dream of flitting shadows. There is a

poetry—and who shall deny to it an unceasing charm? —a poetry that breathes the spirit of meadow and woodland, of cottages nestling in sunny angles, of fields that have known the plough for centuries, of orchards weighted with fruit and lanes heavy with the scent of honeysuckle and meadowsweet, a poetry sweet as country air can make it, that speaks of English Spring and Summer and happy harvests. There is, too, a poetry that is less sweet, that seems born of the barren hills, that bears with it the sharp salt air of the sea; a poetry that summons rather than promises, and in the room of rest offers action. Mr. Meredith has touched the tender stops of various quills, and the Doric lay is not beyond his skill, but in the main his music is the inspiring music of the trumpet that calls to war. And if he fall short as a poet, it is that he is too strenuous to be altogether peaceful, and that the impressions received from his verse are too crowded to permit of that leisurely sipping of the cup, that tranquil enjoyment which is essential to the due appreciation of poetry. Poetry and haste are eternal incompatibles. One cannot bolt a stanza in the five minutes' interval between engagements, nor can one find perfect happiness in the company of a poet whose pace is always a gallop. Mr. Meredith's verse has caught contagion from the hurry and the bustle of modern life. And his

utterance, too, is a *staccato* utterance. It would be untrue to say of him that there was no light and shade in his conceptions, but there is often an absence of light and shade in his expression. And though Mr. Meredith conceives aright the sensuous as well as the intellectual life, his poetry usually, though with brilliant instances to the contrary, lacks the sensuous element, usually fails to express that element as vividly as it expresses the intellectual. Language, especially the language of poetry, has an office other than that of mirroring with precision a train of ideas; it must make appeal to the senses, to the eye and to the ear, to the memory and its associations, to the imagination and its dreams. Yet this is not the day nor the hour to complain of poetry in which the intellectual element outbalances the sensuous; rather we owe to poetry of which this is true a debt of gratitude. A little thought goes far in modern verse, and the critics assure us that even that little is unnecessary. 'Poetry,' Mr. Henley tells us, 'is style.' And in Mr. Meredith's poetry the very force and intensity of his thought communicate a beauty to his phrase—the beauty that shines in strength. Take this of Byron's *Manfred*:—

'Considerably was the world
Of spinsterdom and clergy racked
While he his hinted horrors hurled,
And she pictorially attacked.

A duel hugeous! Tragic? Ho!
The cities, not the mountains, blow
Such bladders; in their shapes confessed
An after-dinner's indigest.'

But Mr. Meredith's is not always the music from an iron string. That he has a manner besides this of rugged force is easily demonstrable. The critic will need to search diligently through English poetry to discover a poem of more blithe and gracious sweetness, more radiant with the dew and sunshine of morning, with the captivating joyance of youth than *Love in the Valley*. The measure—and it may be noted that in metres Mr. Meredith greatly and successfully dares—the measure itself dances to the tripping pulses of the young blood.

'Cool was the woodside; cool as her white dairy
Keeping sweet the cream-pan; and there the boys from school,
Cricketing below, rushed brown and red with sunshine;
O the dark translucence of the deep-eyed cool! . . .

Could I find a place to be alone with heaven,
I would speak my heart out: heaven is my need.
Every woodland tree is flushing like the dogwood,
Flashing like the whitebeam, swaying like the reed.
Flushing like the dogwood crimson in October;
Streaming like the flag-reed south-west blown;
Flashing as in gusts the sudden-lighted whitebeam:
All seem to know what is for heaven alone.'

Here, and in a pastoral not reprinted from his earliest volume, Mr. Meredith's verse bubbles, and

creams, and ripples from the very founts of spring and summer.

'Come, and like bees will we gather the rich golden honey of noontide
Deep in the sweet summer meadows, bordered by hillside and river. . . .
O joy thus to revel all day in the grass of our own belov'd country,
Revel all day till the lark mounts at eve with his sweet 'tirra-lirra';
Thrilling delightfully.'

The lyric beauty of poems such as these will recall to readers of the novels the passion-brimming lyrical enchantments woven in the 'Ferdinand and Miranda' chapters of *Richard Feverel*, beside which I do not know that there is anything in literature to be placed since *Romeo and Juliet* itself. In others of the *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* is heard the same clear lark-like trill of gladness, a music as of the early world untouched by human pain or sorrow, a song of the elements:—

'Water, first of singers, o'er rocky mount and mead,
First of earthly singers, the sun-loved rill
Sang of him, and flooded the ripples on the reed
Seeking whom to waken and what ear fill.'

But to enter into the true spirit of Mr. Meredith's poetry of nature we must come to it by way of *A Reading of Earth*. We are constantly assured by modern criticism and by the practice of modern

poets that it is no part of the poet's duty to be a teacher, that the exposition of belief lies altogether outside the province of art. Mr. Meredith abides by the tradition of the greater English poets, Spenser and Milton and Wordsworth, and his poetry frankly outlines a faith, delineates a philosophy of life. It is a creed of full and lasting 'joy in the old heart of things'; but how hold and live by that creed in the face of the certain sorrows, the uncertain issues, the unavoidable partings of life, the knowledge that

> 'The word of the world is adieu:
> Her word: and the torrents are round,
> The jawed wolf-waters of prey'?

To preserve for the human race during its dark hours the heart of hope, the faith that there is some soul of goodness in things evil, that evil itself is not immortal, and that the destiny of man is something more than to die, is not the meanest achievement of the poet. Yet, when this faith and this hope are threatened, so exclusively does the poetic spirit seem to feed upon the beauty and the pathos of life that the poets often offer us no more than a sad philosophy of 'indifference,' or a fuller life of the senses, the worship of the flesh in despair of soul. But Mr. Meredith in this also abides by the poetic tradition of the greater poets, and refuses to despair

of soul. The resurgent brood of questions—to which Earth, our mother, replies not—are but the brood of unfaith, and earth's silence argues no indifference to her children. Of those who ask them

> 'Earth whispers: they scarce have the thirst,
> Except to unriddle a rune;
> And I spin none; only show,
> Would humanity soar from its worst,
> Winged above darkness and dole,
> How flesh unto spirit must grow.
> Spirit raves not for a goal.
> . . . It trusts;
> Uses my gifts, yet aspires;
> Dreams of a higher than it.'

In *A Faith on Trial*, and in *Earth and Man*, Mr. Meredith sets forth a spiritual philosophy of courageous faith, a philosophy akin, in some respects, to that of Wordsworth, but informed by the later spirit of scientific realism. The poet is now, as the man of the future will be, as we are all fast becoming, neither idealist nor realist, neither one nor the other, because both. If Mr. Meredith in his poetry rejects with the unalterable mien of physical science any mystical explanation of things which leaves the facts and laws of the great external world of our physical nature out of account, he rejects with equal firmness the philosophy of immediate conclusions based upon the slight and meagre knowledge we possess. Like the Christian's, Mr. Mere-

dith's word is 'Faith till proof be ready.' Only when the lesson of

> 'A fortitude quiet as Earth's
> At the shedding of leaves'

has been duly learned, only when the attitude of

> 'unfaith clamouring to be coined
> To faith by proof'

has been abandoned, can the inheritance of the children of Earth be entered upon, the children whose love is without fear, who have taken to heart Earth's counsel—

> '"And if thou hast good faith, it can repose,"
> She tells her son.'

The poem which stands first in the volume of *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* conveys a warning on the threshold to those about to enter on the inheritance, the harvest of full delight in companionship with Earth. These are enchanted woods, and the only charm that affords protection is a spirit of courageous confidence.

> 'Enter these enchanted woods,
> You who dare.
> Nothing harms beneath the leaves
> More than waves a swimmer cleaves.
> Toss your heart up with the lark,
> Foot at peace with mouse and worm,
> Fair you fare.

Only at a dread of dark
Quaver, and they quit their form:
Thousand eyeballs under hoods
Have you by the hair.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.'

Few among Mr. Meredith's poems are more quaintly, and at the same time more powerfully, conceived than this, *The Woods of Westermain.* The very spirit of the forest is abroad in it, a mystery of life lurks in the thicket and among the leaves. With it should be read *Melampus*—

'Where others hear but a hum and see but a beam,
The tongue and eye of the fountain of life he knew.'

Here, as in all his nature-poems, Mr. Meredith moves with the firm step of one to whom the path is a familiar one: a subtle accuracy of observation shines in every epithet. There is no poet since the death of Wordsworth for whom nature has meant so much as for Mr. Meredith. From many of his poems one might conceive him as entirely preoccupied with nature, a close and eager student, to whom the world of individual men and women was little more than a shadowland. How far this is wide of the truth readers of Mr. Meredith's novels are indeed aware; and perhaps we need go no further for convincing proof, if any were needed, of the mental grasp and breadth displayed in his

work, a breadth and grasp unmatched in the work of any living man. The place occupied by nature in modern poetry since the advent of Wordsworth must in large measure be associated with the growth of a knowledge of nature, and the desire for that knowledge displayed in scientific investigation. With Mr. Meredith nature is not so much, as with Wordsworth, an object of impassioned contemplation, an enclasping presence, the source of spiritual ecstasy. She is rather nature as revealed to us by science, the eternal activity, the nature that overflows with individual life. And an enduring place among the English poets is assured to Mr. Meredith if for this alone, that he is the first to accept fearlessly the view of nature offered by modern science, and not to accept it only, but to find that view vitally poetic and inspiring. For this he will be remembered. He will be remembered and honoured as that courageous spirit who, when his companions were assailed by fears, embraced with ready welcome the entire unbroken ring, the whole result of science, and, claiming this too as a province of art, drew from the new truths fresh auguries and hopes and lessons for humanity.

Mr. Meredith's study of nature is that of the naturalist, the naturalist who has become the passionate lover. He would have us believe that a closer intimacy with nature will serve to prove her

'Mother of simple truth,
Relentless quencher of lies,
Eternal in thought,'

and to dispel the unworthy apprehensions which, judging her with shrinking nerves, make her 'a cruel sphinx,'

'A mother of aches and jests;
Soulless, heading a hunt,
Aimless except for the meal.'

She is before and above all the Earth our mother, instructress of her children; and to prate of other worlds ere we have mastered this and its lessons seems to Mr. Meredith the hugest of follies. Man's debt to Earth is not yet fully paid; his glory is that in paying that debt he lays at her feet a nobler garland than any crown of beauty that adorns her brows:—

'He builds the soaring spires,
That sing his soul in stone: of her he draws,
Though blind to her, by spelling at her laws,
Her purest fires.

Through him hath she exchanged,
For the gold harvest-robes, the mural crown,
Her haggard quarry-features and thick frown
Where monsters ranged.

And order, high discourse,
And decency, than which is life less dear,
She has of him: the lyre of language clear,
Love's tongue and source.'

Thus it is that through the knowledge of earth,

'never misread by brain,' we approach a fuller consciousness of the issues and meanings of life,

'Till brain-rule splendidly towers.'

Mr. Meredith is at times obscure, but he is never intangible; he is at times difficult, but he is never unreal. Sureness of grasp, concentration, force, significance—these are the splendid qualities of his style, and at times one catches an accent, a phrase, a verse exquisitely tuneful, a melody wholly his own. How much of the poetry of talent, how much even of the poetry of genius, fails because it does not go deep enough, because it does not lay hold of reality! Mr. Meredith's poetry of nature lays firm hold of reality. Just as Browning had no fear of the real, but delighted in the uncouth, the forbidding, the extravagant natural forms—

'See our fisher arrive
And pitch down his basket before us; all trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit; you touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner of horns and of humps'—

so Mr. Meredith does not fear the real, and does not reserve himself to celebrate nature in

'Her pomp of glorious hues,
Her revelries of ripeness, her kind smile.'

His 'cosmic enthusiasm' is without reservations, his spiritual freedom untrammelled and entire.

The Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life display Mr. Meredith in his characteristic, his unmistakable style, the style which is the despair of so many readers. Here are ballads, indeed, but not of that species which may be defined as the simplest and most direct form of narrative poetry. To disentangle these tales one must proceed warily, and piece each together, like a mosaic, from hints, reflections, apostrophes, and the future may not find ballads of this order acceptable. Save in *The Nuptials of Attila*, the vigour of the manner hardly compensates for the harshness of the narration. But *The Nuptials of Attila* is a notable exception, a notable poem. It is not only a notable, it is an altogether marvellous and indescribable, poem. To read it is to hear the tread of armies, to mingle in the tossing tumult of barbarian camps, to catch one's breath in the presence of the Queen of Tragedy herself. There is no poem with which it can to any purpose be compared. From first to last it displays the characteristics of Mr. Meredith at his best and strongest, and will take rank among the great achievements of modern verse as a *tour de force* of unique power and splendour.

The volume containing these ballads, which represent the poet in his most disdainful mood of the accepted poetical methods, represents him also in his docile mood of almost academic 'correctness,'

content to move in familiar ways of art. The sustained magnificence of diction in *France, December* 1870, recalls the historical accents of our English speech, the English language as written by its greatest masters, as we have grown to love and hope to preserve it.

'The Gods alone
Remember everlastingly; they strike
Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
By their great memories the Gods are known.'

'Lo, strength is of the plain root-virtues born;
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
It is the offspring of the modest years,
The gift of sire to son, thro' those firm laws
Which we name God's; which are the righteous cause,
The cause of man, and manhood's ministers.'

'Soaring France,
Now is Humanity on trial in thee;
Now mayst thou gather humankind in fee;
Now prove that Reason is a quenchless scroll;
Make of calamity thine aureole,
And bleeding, lead us thro' the troubles of the sea.'

This is the English of Milton, and Southey, and Wordsworth, the English that speaks the character and power of the English race. It is evidently not because Mr. Meredith finds it beyond his power to write a simple and direct style that he indulges in the style characteristic of him. In *France*, and in that remarkable series of poems entitled *Modern*

Love, he moves with ease and dignity within the strictest traditions of poetic diction, and if the latter exhibits any obscurities, they are certainly not obscurities of expression. The works of ancient art, said Sainte-Beuve, 'ne sont pas classiques parce qu'ils sont vieux, mais parce qu'ils sont énergiques, frais et dispos.' *Modern Love* is a series of sonnets —we may call them sonnets—modern in phrase, modern in sentiment, modern in their treatment of a subject unknown to ancient art, yet if Saint-Beuve be right, then is Mr. Meredith, the author of *Modern Love*, already a classic. On the appearance of this poem in 1862, the *Spectator* spoke of the author as dealing here with 'a deep and painful subject upon which he has no convictions to express.' But the aim of Mr. Meredith's art is neither to persuade nor to tranquillise. He is neither a concise doctrinaire with ready-made conclusions for his readers, nor the type of poet who affords agreeable shelter for the imagination, from the strain and stress of the world. Throughout his poetry, this strain and stress is exhibited; the fingers of the artist are upon the pulse of the modern world. The web and the woof of Mr. Meredith's poetry are its resolute devotion to the conditions that are present, his achievement as a poet is the singular exactness with which these conditions are presented by him, and elevated to poetic rank. He has extracted

inspiration from conditions which seemed incapable of supplying inspiration, which seemed hostile to it, and from the dull or commonplace, or dispiriting aspects of life, has rescued the stimulus or interest which, properly approached and viewed by the artist, they offer. Sedatives are abundantly supplied in the poetry of the time; in its tonic properties consists the virtue of Mr. Meredith's poetry. It kindles energy, because energy is its preponderating quality, and if he has not cared to provide for his readers the graces and harmonies to which they have grown accustomed, compensations are not wanting. Let it be granted that the familiar accessories of colour and rhythm and impassioned feeling are subservient to the heart of thought. Thought is his familiar, and finds him in every mood; finds him intense and eager, finds him pensive or lyrical, passionate or mirthful, finds him careful or careless of his art, but is his constant, his ever-present familiar, and the wise will be willing to accept Mr. Meredith in all his moods.

If the music seem harsh, or the strain a jangled one,

> 'But listen in the thought; so may there come
> Conception of a newly-added chord,
> Commanding space beyond where ear has home.'

As to the greatness of *Modern Love*, that tragedy of the heart, a sombre picture etched in quick suggestions alive with tragic irony and force,—as to

the greatness of that poem in respect of execution, Mr. Swinburne may be left to speak.

'Take almost any sonnet at random out of this series, and let any one qualified to judge for himself of metre, choice of expression, and splendid language decide on its claims. And after all, the test will be unfair except as regards metrical or pictorial merit, every section of this great progressive poem being connected with the other, by links of the finest and most studied workmanship. Take, for example, that noble sonnet, beginning

'We saw the swallows gathering in the skies,'

a more perfect piece of writing no man alive has turned out; witness these three lines, the greatest perhaps of the book :—

'And in the largeness of the evening earth,
Our spirit grew as we walked side by side,
The hour became her husband and my bride';

but in transcription it must lose the colour and effect given it by its place in the series; the grave and tender beauty, which make it at once a bridge and a resting-place between the admirable poems of passion it falls among.'

It needs but to read this sonnet-sequence, or some other of the finer of Mr. Meredith's sonnets—*Lucifer in Starlight* or *The Spirit of Shakespere*—or to recall lines like these :—

'In tragic life, God wot
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot;
We are betrayed by what is false within';

or these :—

'The city of the smoky fray;
A prodded ox, it drags and moans;
Its Morrow no man's child; its Day
A vulture's morsel beaked to bones':

it needs but to read such poetry to feel that it follows the best traditions of English verse, owing its effects, not to verbal ingenuities, but to simple gravity of thought, expressed in words which follow a natural order, whose music is the wholly unforced music of the greater poets.

The poetry of Mr. Meredith gives a new aim to art, and demands a new feeling for the results attained in pursuance of that aim, and the altered conditions essential to it. But the lovers of the poetry of an elder day will not find it impossible, or even difficult, to accommodate their vision to the changed surroundings. There is a sentence quoted by Professor Dowden in his essay from Edgar Quinet, which seems to me to express with admirable strength and conciseness the impressions that will finally be left upon the reader of Mr. Meredith's poetry: 'Each day justice has appeared to me more holy, liberty more fair, speech more sacred, art more real, reality more artistic, poetry more true, truth more poetical, nature more divine, and what is divine more natural.'

THE POETRY OF THE DE VERES

THE Wordsworthian tradition has fared ill in poetry since 1850. That tradition lays emphasis upon the attitude and habit of mind involved in poetic composition, and thus upon its substance; to language, however skilfully handled, it denies any sufficient virtue to elevate or of itself make poetic the ordinary material of thought. With Wordsworth it was the impassioned and truthful view of things that was essential; when that was lacking, the 'accomplishment of verse' was a trivial copy-book matter. Poetry for him was 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge, the impassioned expression that was on the face of science,' and against all theories of 'poetic diction,' against any effort to construct poetry out of words in the absence of the inspiring idea he had set his face from the first. The root-conception in the Wordsworthian, as in the classical theory of poetry, is that the employment of rhythm, and more especially of the complex rhythms of lyric verse, presupposes some depth of meaning, some intensity of emotion

which prose at its best can but imperfectly and inadequately render. It is certain that verse attracts because verse is an intense and emphatic form of expression. It is equally certain that verse disappoints and wearies, save in the way of parody or comedy, when there is nothing intense or emphatic to express; when an attempt is made to transmute the trite, the fanciful, or the commonplace, to disguise them in the robes of sovereign thought, or of sovereign emotion, by tricking them out in metrical dress. If it were possible to constitute a Supreme Court of Appeal in matters poetic before which aspirants for the poet's bays were compelled to appear, such a court would perhaps do no great injustice by requiring from each candidate some work in prose, not as an exercise in language, but as a witness to intellectual or imaginative power, as witness to a way of regarding things, to mental methods at once rational and suggestive, to types of thought or feeling for the perfect representation of which verse was the natural and proper medium. Did such a court exist, we should be spared the frequent necessity of the judgment best delivered in Heine's words, 'Das hättest du Alles sehr gut in guter Prosa sagen können.' But the decrees of such a court would condemn not a few of our poets to the exile of perpetual silence.

Wordsworth denied then that 'poetry can boast any celestial ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose.' But in the 'superlative lollipops' of his early verse Tennyson once more asserted the indefinable charm of new and cunning modulations and verbal melodies, even when but slightly informed by real strength of thought or fire of feeling. The course of the later stream of poetry has flowed in other channels than those in which Wordsworth would have had it run. The sovereignty of the spirit is no longer recognised, and, with exceptions few and honourable, the poets have sworn allegiance to Our Lady of Music. The poetry approximating to music, expressive of half-articulate emotion not yet definitely yoked with or transmuted into mental images,—this poetry, dependent for such value as it may possess upon its expression rather than upon its spirit, is the characteristic poetry of the latter half of the present century. In Mr. Swinburne, its leader, and the popular choir, the view of things taken by the poet, his philosophy, his imaginative grasp and interpretation of life count for little. In their place delicate turns of phrase are zealously sought out, the dainty effects of collocated vowels, the ripple of alliteration, the aromas and the colours that fascinate the sense. We are presented by the poets of to-day with phials full of odours, and he is

the best poet whose distillations catch the breath and sting the nerves with the most pungent perfumes. Yet, however far we are tempted to wander from it, the severe magnificence of pure as distinct from decorative art never fails to recall us, and we know that to it the final success indisputably belongs. Read but diligently enough in Mr. Swinburne's many volumes, and after a time the charm begins to fail, it ceases to have its early effects: we are taking in nothing, we are simply marking time musically. In the verse of the majority of our poets it is the same. Nothing is to be found there that is not very pleasing, but in the end we are not pleased.

'The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.'

There is nothing 'to hold or to keep,' and we recognise that beyond the marking of time musically we have been unemployed. A critic who abides by the Wordsworthian tradition essays to distinguish between poets by the internal differences in their work due to divergent mental methods and sympathies, by the intellectual and emotional framework upon which the artist builds. Such a critic seeks for the soul of the work, which is the fountain of its power; his endeavour must be to find the individual character, the *man* in the poem. He will recognise a poem as Shelley's or as

Byron's by the unmistakable internal evidences of its authorship, by the spirit that is abroad in it. In the poetry of our own time what guidance from internal evidence is possible? The critic will trace a recent poem to its source by an investigation of the vocabulary, the structure of the rhythm, and it may be by echoes of the poetry other than his own read by the author.

> 'They are past as a slumber that passes,
> As the dew of a dawn of old time;
> More swift than the shadows on glasses,
> More fleet than a wave or a rhyme.'

We know this style; not by its heart of thought, but by its parti-coloured raiment. The voice is the voice of Mr. Swinburne, but the commonplace is the commonplace of the general choir. Now, in the case of the *Di majores* the commonplace is their own commonplace, it is part of the general stock that they have appropriated and assimilated; the spirit that is abroad in them shines throughout their speech.

> 'These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
> The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
> By a strong siding champion, Conscience.'

The voice is undoubtedly the voice of Milton; but though no very great thing in itself, it expresses Milton's habitual way of thought.

'Six feet in earth my Emma lay,
And yet I loved her more,
For so it seemed, than till that day
I e'er had loved before.'

The voice of Wordsworth not at his best, but Wordsworth's intellectual method is displayed here.

The great mass of modern poetry offers on the contrary nothing to give the clue to any unique individual pattern of mind possessed by the poet. It confines itself to saying nothing in particular with delicate perfection, in an exquisite key of words. The office of most modern poets seems to be that of carpet-minstrelsy; though from *Barrack-Room Ballads* one derives hope for the future. An enduring truth, a true instinct, lies at the root of Wordsworth's theory that greatness in art is greatness in conception, that 'fundamental brain-work' is the secret of its power. Speaking of Tennyson, Wordsworth struck upon the weakness which the splendour of his robe of language not infrequently concealed: 'He is not much in sympathy with what I should myself most value in my attempts, viz. the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to view the material universe, and the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances.' Its most ordinary appearances are for the true poets pregnant with meaning; their subjects lie ready to hand.[1] Language is the

[1] Mr. Rudyard Kipling has found not a few that serve.

medium in which they work, but the substance is more than the medium.

And the subjects of modern poetry, its criticism of life? How needful after it all, as Saint-Beuve would say, to take up some wise book, where common-sense holds the field, and where the simple and sound language is the reflection of a delicate and manly soul! We exclaim, Oh for the style of manly men, of men who have revered the things worthy of reverence, whose feelings have been governed by the principles of good taste! Oh for the polished, pure, and moderate writers! A little of the bracing air of the dawn of the century after this enervating, breathless time of its decline, an hour or two with plain good sense and simple diction and human beings that belong to the real world!

Than such exclusive devotion to form as is conspicuous in the Victorian era there is no surer sign of the absence of inspiring motive and imaginative wealth. 'Es ist immer ein Zeichen einer unproductiven Zeit,' said Goethe, 'wenn die so ins Kleinliche des Technischen geht, und eben so ist ein Zeichen eines unproductiven Individuums, wenn es sich mit dergleichen befasst.'[1] No large canvas is

[1] 'A second invaluable merit which I find in Wordsworth is this: he has something to say. Perhaps one prizes this merit the more as one grows old, and has less time left for trifling. Goethe got so sick of the fuss about form and technical details, without due care for adequate contents, that he said if he were younger he

attempted even by the successful artists. How often has it been lamented, for example, that the great series of English historical portraits begun but left unfinished by Shakespeare have not attracted the poets who followed him. Tennyson, it is said, was of opinion—an opinion apparently abandoned later—that the great subjects had all been treated and were exhausted, and chose for himself the artistic embellishment of slighter themes. But the confession, though a proof of individual weakness, afterwards confirmed, has no warrant in reality. It was not prompted by a judgment of insight. In Browning's *Ring and the Book*, Sir Aubrey de Vere's *Mary Tudor*, and Mr. Aubrey de Vere's *Alexander the Great*, we have abundant confirmation of the opposite view, which finds in the great artist sufficient cause for the great work. When lesser men complain of the cramping influences of the age, of the blighting conditions, the unpropitious environment, the great work is unexpectedly produced, and the apparently impossible is achieved. It is of the very nature of genius to achieve the unexpected, the impossible—for other men.

Little encouragement as there is in these days

should take pleasure in setting the so-called art of the new school of poets at naught, and in trusting for his whole effect to his having something important to say.'—M. ARNOLD.

for those *Musas severiores qui colunt*, yet to read the poetry of our own times is a species of intellectual necessity, and hence perhaps the vein of indignation in certain minds arising out of personal disappointment. Some of us, like Tantalus, sick with hunger and thirst, yet never able to satisfy our appetites, become somewhat irascible. That poetic representations, estimates, interpretations of the life and thought and movement of the world in which we are active agents as well as spectators, with which we are naturally most in sympathy, and of compulsion have exclusively to do,—that these are needful for us we feel keenly. In each age too there are revised estimates of the persons, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual tendencies, and the actions and movements of past ages; and with many of these the poet alone is competent to deal. It is therefore no fictitious demand which each succeeding epoch makes for a poet to express its deepest convictions. The great poets doubtless are for all time, but to be without powerful poetical interpreters in the present is a want in the age for which no excellence in the poetry of the past can compensate. Nevertheless, it is a thousand times better to confess our wants than to suffer ourselves to be deluded miserably by the fashionable 'make-believe' criticism, that will persuade us in terms of insolent assertion that half the respectable verse-

writers of the day are great poets. The daily 'discoveries' of 'great poets' by the 'eminent critics' of the literary journals—do they not wake the ancestral savage in the blood?

But though the Wordsworthian tradition has fared ill at the hands of the majority, it has been carried on, and nobly. In the poetry of the de Veres, father and son, there is, indeed, a richer mine of inspiring thought, a subtler vein of reflection, a wider dramatic range, a purer sensibility, and a simpler, more forcible diction than in the work of perhaps any living poet. To escape from the region occupied by the poets who are fanciful rather than imaginative, striking rather than truthful, brilliant in restatement of the ordinary poetic sentiment rather than illuminating,—to escape 'the thirst after outrageous stimulation,' if we read the poetry of to-day, it must be that of Mr. de Vere. Take almost at random a passage in *Alexander the Great* to illustrate the spontaneous elastic expression of fine thought, the larger utterance that distinguishes Mr. de Vere from his contemporaries. Craterus describes the character of Alexander:—

'He wills not opposition to his will.
Since first he breathed this Asian air of kingship,
Divinity of kings hath touched him much;
First in his blood it played like other lusts;
It mounted next to fancy's seat, and now
His eye usurping purples all his world.'

Or take the same speaker's description of Ptolemy :—

> 'A speculative man that knows not men,
> A man whose blood flows sweetly through his veins,
> Leaving at every point a sleepy pleasure
> That needs must overflow to all our race
> In vague complacent kindness. All his thoughts
> In orbits as of planets curving go,
> And grasp, like them, blank space. Your minds majestic,
> Like Ptolemy's, are oft but stately triflers.'

How unlike the twitterings to which we are accustomed! This is a manner distinctive and fine in itself, the instrument of a mind at once subtle and comprehensive, at home in the region of human heart and life.

Sir Aubrey de Vere, who was a contemporary of Byron and of Sir Robert Peel[1] at Harrow, was like Wordsworth, his friend, cradled into poetry by Nature, amid the same scenes as that poet, beside the 'peaceful mountain stream' that flows from Grasmere and Rydal into Windermere—the Rotha. But human nature claimed him and the *historia spectabilis* of the drama. *Julian the Apostate* and *The Duke of Mercia* were his first considerable compositions; *Mary Tudor*, by far his greatest work, was not published until after

[1] Peel on one occasion, 'to save his friend trouble, wrote a copy of Latin verses so good that the "fine Roman hand" was well-nigh detected, and the two boys with difficulty escaped punishment.'

the author's death in 1846, and as a consequence was never revised. Sir Aubrey de Vere's life was by no means wholly devoted to poetry. We are told by his son that probably not more than two years of his life, scattered over its various portions, were spent in the composition of his longer works. They must necessarily have occupied his mind for more extended periods of time than is here indicated, but Sir Aubrey de Vere cannot be regarded as in any sense a poet by profession:—

'His reading was discursive, military works interesting him not less than poetry or history. From his boyhood he had approached military subjects with the ardour of a soldier, studying campaigns ancient and modern, with the aid of maps as well as books, a habit to which he probably owed his minute geographical knowledge, and a singular power of realising, as a tactician might, the relative positions of remote places.'

By birth an Irishman, Sir Aubrey de Vere's sympathies were divided between his native country and England, the home of his remoter ancestors, —sympathies which found expression in his historical sonnets and in those composed upon scenes of natural beauty in Ireland. In the brief memoir written by his son, which appears in the volume containing *Mary Tudor*, there is put on record an estimate of the man by one who bent over

him after his death,—an estimate which harmonises well with any that can be passed upon his poetry,—'In that brow I see three things—Imagination, Reverence, and Honour.' Among the fragments left behind him, the following now serves as a motto to his work as a poet:—

> 'An if I be a worm, mine office is
> Like his which spins a thread that shall attire
> The noblest of the land; and when his task
> Is rightly done, sleeps, and puts forth again
> His powers in wings that waft him like an angel,
> Onward from flower to flower and up to heaven.'

It is a somewhat difficult task to criticise Sir Aubrey de Vere's early dramas, a task made still more difficult in the case of poems which can hardly be said ever to have had a spell of life in public favour. With many of the qualities that compose distinction and compel admiration, they fail to command—as poetry must do or drop into oblivion—the attention, it may be said, in its own despite. The reader cannot fail to acknowledge their power, but he is not taken captive. With *Mary Tudor* it is quite another matter: one does not escape there from the poet's net; we are enmeshed in its magic toils from first to last. His friends might well be content to rest Sir Aubrey de Vere's reputation upon his Sonnets, pronounced by Wordsworth 'amongst the most

perfect of our age,' or upon that magnificent creation just spoken of, *Mary Tudor*, which two such different minds as those of Mr. Gladstone and the late Cardinal Manning agreed in placing next to Shakespeare. Probably no critical panegyric would induce any but a stray student of poetry in these hurrying days to read *Julian* or *The Duke of Mercia*. Yet, if once read by him, that they would be read a second time is not improbable. But, like Southey, the author seems to have held the unpopular theory that poetry ought to elevate rather than affect; and his early dramas, like Southey's epics, move on a plane above that on which the drama of life proceeds for ordinary human beings. To the few who read Southey's epics these dramas can be confidently recommended as sustaining like them, with evident ease, the weight of a difficult subject, and rising at times to incontestable displays of passion and of power.

The high level sustained in Sir Aubrey de Vere's poetry is one of its most striking characteristics. If not inspiring throughout—and what poet is inspiring throughout?—he is never paltry, and the verse moves with a conscious unflagging dignity that corresponds to the grave and luminous current of thought beneath. That so fine a subject for historical tragedy as *Mary Tudor*, treated with such dramatic and poetic force as Sir Aubrey de

Vere possessed, should be comparatively neglected, suggests several reflections. It seems clear that the reputation of a poet must be built up; that an enduring popular recognition of his genius is impossible unless he have laid a foundation broad enough to permit of appreciation from a circle wider than the circle of culture. For, after all, it is not to the critics nor even to the students that the gods have granted the disposal of fame, but to the people. The average man is little of a critic in any eyes other than his own, but upon his knees lie the final dooms of authors. That Sir Aubrey de Vere wrote little poetry which appealed to the general circle of readers militated against his acceptance as a representative poet of his epoch. And indeed he was not its representative. His interests were not sufficiently local and temporary, nor in the fashion of the time. He interpreted few feelings, faiths, or aspirations of his day, and thus missed the path which Tennyson, in whose brain the man of the world was not unrepresented, took,—the path that leads direct to fame. Sir Aubrey de Vere chose too for his longer works a poetic form, the dramatic, to which readers had grown unaccustomed, and by whose unfamiliarity they were at the outset discouraged.

But whether recognised by the *vox populi* or not, the delineation of Mary Tudor ranks indis-

putably as the finest delineation of royal character since Shakespeare. The note of the characterisation is that it presents a queen who is a woman, a woman who was also a queen; for royal, with all her faults, Mary Tudor was: royalty sat visibly upon the Tudor brow. To restore womanliness to that Queen of England whom history, as it was written, had presented as an impossible personification of bloodthirstiness, was a dramatic aim, noble in itself, and in execution nobly sustained. 'The author of *Mary Tudor*,' writes Mr. de Vere, in the fine preface to his father's play, 'used to affirm that most of the modern historians had mistaken a part, and that the smaller part, of the sad Queen's character for the whole of it.' Sir Aubrey de Vere's conception of Mary's character deserves consideration, not only as poetic, but as in reality the most authentic portrait we possess,—historically more correct as taking in a larger group of facts, and morally deeper and more convincing as consistent with real human nature. To it should be accorded the respect due to greater truthfulness and insight, as well as the admiration due to a more powerful artistic presentation than can be found in any other, whether painted by historian or rival poet.

No criticism of *Mary Tudor* can avoid comparing it with the *Queen Mary* of Tennyson,

published twenty-eight years later. While neither of the dramas dealing with Queen Mary can be charged as pieces of special pleading, both attempt a revision of the historic estimate passed in her disfavour by popular English traditions. Were it necessary to sum up in a sentence the relative impressions produced by these companion pictures, it might fairly be said, *Mary Tudor* is the work of a dramatist and a poet, *Queen Mary* the work of a poet; the first is dramatic in the fullest sense throughout, the latter poetic throughout, and only in parts dramatic. That Sir Aubrey de Vere had more of a native dramatic instinct than Lord Tennyson cannot be questioned. The grasp of character in his plays is firmer, the action and movement more inevitable, more highly and simply natural. The *dramatis personæ* move and speak as in the movement and speech of real life. The dialogue is vital, not a conversation issuing from the mouths of puppets; the groups are natural groups, and the action unfolds itself as the necessary outcome of the circumstances and characters involved. Nowhere does Sir Aubrey de Vere fritter away dramatic effects by indulgence in prettinesses, nowhere seek opportunities for poetical descriptions; but, when such arise, the poetry is as pure and sweet as any in Lord Tennyson's drama. Take this from the scene on Wanstead

Heath, exquisite in itself, and full of pathos from the lips of the loneliest queen that ever sat on throne:—

'MARY.

How name you this fair prospect?

ARUNDEL.

Wanstead Heath,
By Epping Chase.

MARY.

How blest these breezy downs,
With purple heath and golden gorse enamelled;
Each bosky bank with dewy windflowers strewn,
Each dell with cowslip and rathe violet,—
And the sun-loving daisy on hill-tops
Drinking the light! Ah, happy shepherd's life!
He this sweet solitude, without constraint,
Explores, his chosen damsel at his side;
Recounting tales of love and plighted faith;
Or from his pipe pours such delicious song
That the wild hare in the close bitten lane
Pauses with ear erect, and timorous deer
That down the labyrinthine forest glade
Goes bounding, starts aside, and turns to gaze.'

Sir Aubrey de Vere's blank verse is the blank verse of the English drama,—the *panharmonion*, as Symonds called it, the universal instrument as used by the Elizabethans. Tennyson's blank verse is the verse of the *Idylls of the King*, arranged to suit dialogue. Sweetness and an ornate beauty it possesses, but nowhere, I think, the dramatic ring, the broken pause of power, the alternate gravity and swiftness of living speech.

But this comparison is made with the mind's eye upon the first of the two dramas that compose the tragedy of *Mary Tudor*. Sir Aubrey's second drama, though a fine work in itself, loses by following the first, and, if compared alone with *Queen Mary*, might not without question bear away the palm. The reader fresh from a perusal of the first play, who has felt its condensed power, finds a certain diffuseness, and experiences less distinctly a unity of impression. The delineation is not so sharp nor arresting, the action somewhat languid, and, to some degree, the sentiment and thought seem to return upon themselves. Had Sir Aubrey de Vere lived to publish the work himself, there can be little doubt that much would have been altered, and the whole shortened. The weakness, if weakness there be in the second drama, is only weakness by comparison with the first. So fine a tragedy was produced by the author of the early part of the Queen's reign that it was hardly possible to add another. The second play contributes little to our knowledge of Mary: the horror of remorse with which the first drama closes is in itself intensely tragic; and to the tragedy of a broken heart, the accumulation of sorrows or the advent of death lends no additional terrors. After the scene in which Mary sees from her window in the Tower the executioner hold up

to view the once lovely head of Jane Grey, and the unhappy Queen cries,

'Pah! I am choked—my mouth is choked with blood!'

no scene remained in her life of such overpowering agony. Life contained for her henceforth only

'Sorrow's faded form and Solitude behind.'

Mary's failure and death are far less touching, fraught far less with the 'pity and terror' of tragedy, than her remorse in the moment of final triumph over her enemies. Throughout the first part, which opens with Northumberland's plot to seize the crown for his son's wife and ends with Jane Grey's execution, the poet with the finest instinct retains our sympathy for the Queen no less than for her innocent rival. In weaker hands the play would undoubtedly have become the tragedy of Lady Jane Grey, the guiltless victim of her father's ambition; but Sir Aubrey de Vere makes us realise, and it is a dramatic achievement of the first order, that the real suffering, the weight upon the heart which makes tragedy, is Mary's. Lady Jane suffers, indeed, innocently; but her whiteness of soul and devotion of love make her sorrows less sorrowful, and death a release from a world of troubles. That Sir Aubrey de Vere could give us such a picture as this of Lady Jane's last short

interview with her mother, and still command our deepest grief for the Queen who signed her death-warrant, is surely a proof of the highest tragic genius:—

'What shall I give thee?—they have left me little—
What slight memorial through soft tears to gaze on?
This bridal ring—the symbol of past joy?
I cannot part with it; upon this finger
It must go down into the grave. Perchance
After long years some curious hand may find it,
Bright, like our better hopes, amid the dust,
And piously, with a low sigh, replace it.
Here—take this veil, and wear it for my sake.
And take this winding-sheet to him; and this
Small handkerchief, so wetted with my tears,
To wipe the death-damp from his brow. This kiss—
And this—my last—print on his lips, and bid him
Think of me to the last, and wait my spirit.
Farewell, my mother! Farewell, dear, dear mother!
These terrible moments I must pass in prayer—
For the dying—for the dead! Farewell! farewell!'

The gentleness, fortitude, and constancy of Jane Grey, her solicitude for her husband's life, her quiet acceptance of her own fate, the singleness of purpose and the beauty of her character, act as a foil to the political craft and pusillanimous shrinking from the result of his own acts displayed by Northumberland, and no less to the stormy passion and thirst for revenge in Mary alternating with woman's weakness and remorse. The delineation of the struggle in which the Queen's soul is

tempest-tost among the winds and waves of passion and native inclination, driven at one time by her imperious will, fortified by the resolve to keep guard over 'the true cross and the authentic faith,' at another swayed by a passionate craving, a wistful longing, infinitely pathetic, for some real affection, or by an inclination towards clemency and a milder policy,—this delineation can hardly fail to recall the tragic elevation, the 'high passions and high actions,' of the Elizabethan drama. How finely this recalls the accent of an elder day! The Queen's passion is fairly alight, and the sword has been thrown into the scale of vengeance; 'the demon wakes within her heart,' and her mood passes into frenzy and madness:—

'MARY.

I want
To see Jane Grey—after her widowhood.

FAKENHAM (*aside*).

After?—She then shall live.

GARDINER (*aside*).

Observe, she raves.

MARY.

We 'll sit together in some forest nook
Or sunless cavern by the moaning sea,
And talk of sorrow and vicissitudes
Of hapless love, and luckless constancy,
And hearts that death or treachery divides!
What 's the hour? Be quick, be quick, I 've much to do.

GARDINER.

Just noon.

MARY.

There will be death soon on the air,
With outspread pinions making an eclipse.
Ha! ha! brave work we Queens do! Destiny
Is in our hands—yea, in these very veins
The spirit of the fatal Sisterhood
Riots! The snakes of the Eumenides
Brandish their horrent tresses round my head!'

Of the minor characters, or rather the characters other than protagonist, Northumberland, Jane Grey, and Cardinal Pole are the most finely drawn; and, for the worthless Philip, Sir Aubrey de Vere compels a hate akin to that which Shakespeare compels for a stronger though hardly more hateful villain in Iago. Mary's passion for Philip cannot be read as a passion real in itself, but as centred on the only possible object for her lifelong repressed affections. She sought some outlet for the sweeter springs beneath the bitter waters of her soul. Gardiner and Cranmer are great historical portraits, worthy of their place in a drama which, with admirable impartiality, describes a period so full of religious passions, and, within the narrow circumference of its acts and scenes, depicts the very life and figure of the times as no historian has given or ever can give it,—England vexed

with fierce religious discords and civil strife, stained with innocent blood, aflame with hatreds as with martyrs' fires,—England in whose borders the spirit of independence of an already ancient and free people was even now astir, but in which the various elements of the national life were not yet fused and unified as they were to be fused and unified in the reign of Elizabeth.

Like characters drawn by all great artists, Sir Aubrey de Vere's portraits are at once individual and typical, at once persons and types. To each individual belongs a personality that differs from all others in the world; but it rests upon a human foundation, an understructure which is the same for all men. It is no high artistic achievement for the painter to limn a face which we recognise as in the abstract beautiful, or to reproduce features we know and recognise; but to see in every human countenance not its distinguishing lines alone, but those more fleeting which mark a special type, or to inform with human expression some abstract ideal of beauty, argues a power that belongs to the highest imaginative, combined with the highest observant and executive, genius. In Sir Aubrey de Vere's portraiture in *Mary Tudor* a thoughtful student will read the features not of individuals alone, but of individuals who belong to a certain age, a certain epoch

in the history of England and of the world. Human and personal, they are also racial and peculiar to an epoch. Mary and Jane Grey, English to the core, though of natures widely differing; Northumberland and Cardinal Pole, types of the Englishmen of the period; Philip, the representative of Spain; and Gardiner, of the narrower stronger Churchmen whose religion consumed their humanity, and so on throughout the play. It would be difficult to find among English dramas one which would serve better as a gallery, wherein to study the prevailing types of mind during the period of which it treats, than *Mary Tudor*.

Sir Aubrey de Vere is greater in the old tradition of the drama, in the representation of action and of character displayed in action. Mr. de Vere excels, like Browning, in the intellectual drama, the internal development of character *amid* circumstances rather than its delineation *by* action, in the actual conflict and clash of forces in the external world. Taken together, they represent the highest reach in the present century, of the drama of action and the drama of thought. Of the drama of thought, or the intellectual drama, *Hamlet* may serve as an example, where the character of the hero displays itself in the life of his mind, rather than in the field of action, since he is in action

uncertain and wavering, and acts from sudden impulses, instead of along definite lines of policy. The proper instrument of the intellectual drama, which is mainly concerned with crises in the history of the soul, seems to be, as with Browning, monologue, and it is noticeable that in *Hamlet* the monologues are more frequent and more lengthy than in any other of Shakespeare's tragedies. Mr. de Vere's method is somewhat different. In his finest play he makes a gradual revelation of the character of Alexander, largely by a chronicle in dialogue of the impressions made by his personality upon those in contact with him, partly by Alexander's own words, and partly by his actions. How admirable is this when Parmenio, King Philip's old general, corrects his son Philotas's conception of Alexander, and the causes of his success in war!—

'PHILOTAS.

One half his victories come but of his blindness,
And noting not the hindrance.

PARMENIO.

At Granicus—
But that was chance. At Issus he was greater;
I set small store on Egypt or on Tyre;
Next came Arbela. Half a million foes
Melted like snow. To him Epaminondas
Was as the wingless creature to the winged.

PHILOTAS.

I grant his greatness were his godship sane!
But note his brow; 'tis Thought's least earthly temple:
Then mark beneath that round, not human eye,
Still glowing like a panther's! In his body
No passion dwells; but all his mind is passion,
Wild intellectual appetite, and instinct
That works without a law.

PARMENIO.

But half you know him.
There is a zigzag lightning in his brain
That flies in random flashes, yet not errs;
His victories seem but chances;—link those chances,
And under them a science you shall find,
Though unauthentic, contraband, illicit,
Yea, contumelious oft to laws of war.
Fortune, that as a mistress smiles on others,
Serves him as duty bound; her blood is he,
Born in the purple of her royalties.'

If this be not in the manner of the great masters, one might well be at a loss to adduce examples of their manner. This passage serves well to illustrate Mr. de Vere's characteristic diction at its best, —'a style,' to use Matthew Arnold's luminous description of Wordsworth's best writing, 'a style of perfect plainness, relying for effect solely on the weight and force of that which with entire fidelity it utters.' It is a diction which aims at no surprises for the reader. It does not care to goad him into excitement if his imagination or his feelings are dull, and it thus elects to suffer com-

parative neglect amongst the styles of the day, which ask nothing from the reader, but take upon themselves to electrify his already over-stimulated nerves by the surprising and the ostentatious.

'During the last century,' writes Mr. de Vere in his preface to *Alexander the Great*, 'it was thought philosophical to sneer at the "Macedonian madman," and moral to declaim against him as a bandit. Maturer reflection has led us to the discovery that "a fool's luck" helping a robber's ambition could hardly have enabled a youth but twenty-two years of age when he began his enterprise to conquer half the world in ten years. The ancients made no such mistake. They admired, and therefore they understood.' Mr. de Vere's study and presentation of the person and achievements of Alexander bring before us the greatest captain of the ancient world with the sharpness and reality of outline that time, when counted by centuries, in despite of all historical records does so much to efface. One imperative demand is made upon fictional art—it must be convincing. And this whether it works in the field of pure invention and reproduces types, or in the field of history, and clothes the skeleton records with flesh and blood. The creative artist makes what we may call his only—for it is his fatal—failure, when he fails to be convincing. However roughly his material be handled, however ineffectively he

executes detail, if the result leaves the impression of reality, if it convinces the eye and mind, the highest success has been achieved. Verisimilitude can hardly be gained at too dear a cost. Because it must be gained at all costs, an artist who works upon a period other than his own burdens himself with preliminary study. He must himself live the life of the period; he must not only know its outward shows, the dress it wore, its life of field and hearth, its pomp and circumstance, but he must know its inner life, sympathise with its ways of thought, experience its emotions, and feel the truth of its beliefs.

Perhaps Mr. de Vere of all living men, partly by natural affinity of mind and partly by reason that he is a poet, has the closest knowledge of, the fullest sympathy with, that period of European history which we are accustomed somewhat vaguely to denominate the Middle Ages. Much of his finest poetry is steeped in the spiritual mood, and might have been composed in the environment, of those ages. He has written what might almost be termed an apology for the Middle Ages in the preface to his *Mediæval Records*. But it is a proof of the breadth and intellectual range of his genius, that he has produced no greater work than that which deals with the Pagan world, and a type of such distinctly Pagan heroism as Alexander. True it is that Mr. de Vere finds in pride the great vice in his char-

acter, 'the all-pervading vice,' as he writes, 'which, except in the rarest instances, blended itself like a poison with Pagan greatness, and penetrated into its essence.' But in so doing he is not judging Alexander by the standard of Christian virtue, but by a standard which the highest minds among the ancients, such as Alexander's master, Aristotle, might have applied, and by his admiration for Alexander's heroic and intellectual qualities he proves for himself the possession of that openness and independence of mind which are so essential in judgments upon the persons and actions of ages other than our own.

Broadly human and sympathetic treatment of any period, however far removed from the present, could hardly fail to be successful ; but in *Alexander the Great* one's admiration is claimed, not alone for the poet, but for the student whose alert eye caught sight of the finer details and possibilities of poetic and dramatic material in the comparatively scanty records of the year 323 B.C. From the hints in Plutarch Shakespeare reconstructed the main characters in the Roman plays. Mr. de Vere gleaned a like precious harvest in the same field, but took the incident which is in some respects the most interesting in Alexander's life, his visit to the Temple in Jerusalem, from Josephus. Of this incident Mr. de Vere makes a poetic and legitimate use, in tracing the effect of the religions of the

East, and especially of the monotheism of the Hebrews, upon the imperial mind of the soldier-statesman. Alexander's sublime idea of a universal empire, 'redeemed from barbarism and irradiated with Greek science and art,' proceeded from a mind far other than that which guides the designs of the successful general. As Mr. de Vere says, 'His intellect was at once vast and minute, his mind was at once idealistic and practical,' and he was keenly susceptible of the reality and moral depth of the religions held by the peoples whom his genius overthrew. But Alexander's pride of power, ministered to by a dazzling series of successes, choked the spiritual fountains of his nature. So self-centred he stands, even in his moments of doubt, and in the company of his only friend Hephestion, that his thought cannot travel beyond the circle of the one supreme ambition of his life. From the religions of the conquered peoples he extracts material to feed his quenchless pride; or, if that be impossible, he can at least, by resource to scepticism, set aside their appeals to higher ideals, and at the worst he can cut the tangled knot with his resistless sword.

'This only know we—
We walk upon a world not knowable
Save in those things which knowledge least deserve,
Yet capable, not less, of task heroic.
My trust is in my work; on that I fling me,
Trampling all questionings down.'

The many aspects of Alexander's character, beside that of its overmastering pride, his poetic mysticism, soldierly decision, statesmanlike foresight, consummate coolness and dexterity, passion and ardour, subtlety, and an instinct almost animal, are all revealed by Mr. de Vere in firm but delicately contrived strokes; and much more than these. How much of insight he gives us into the heart of the man in this contemptuous reference to Philotas, whom he has put to death on a suspicion of treason unproven!—

> 'I, in his place,
> Had ta'en small umbrage at my days abridged:
> There lived not scope nor purpose in his life
> Which death could mar.'

How affectingly, and with what exquisite appropriateness of scene, does Mr. de Vere introduce us to the only expression of Alexander's feelings which were not wholly centred in himself! With Hephestion Alexander visits the tomb of Achilles, and anoints the pillar that marks the grave; Hephestion lingers:—

> 'ALEXANDER.
>
> The night descends.
> Hephestion, I depart.—You tarried;—wherefore?
>
> HEPHESTION.
>
> For justice's sake and friendship's. Is there room
> For nothing, then, but greatness on the earth?
> I crowned that other tomb.

ALEXANDER.

What tomb?

HEPHESTION.

It stood
Close by, the loftier;—greater love had raised it;—
Patroclus' tomb.

ALEXANDER.

'Tis strange I marked it not.

HEPHESTION.

These two were friends.

ALEXANDER.

Ay! nor in death divided.

HEPHESTION.

Therefore, despite that insolent cynic sect,
The gods have care for things on earth.

ALEXANDER.

Hephestion!
That which Patroclus to Achilles was
Art thou to me—my nearest and mine inmost.
In them, not lives alone, but fates were joined;
Patroclus died, Achilles followed soon.'

The character of Alexander, whose 'one human affection,' his friendship for Hephestion, 'did not escape the alloy' of pride, has an historic and philosophical interest; that of Hephestion an interest more near, human and personal. Without Hephestion the drama could not but have lain

somewhat outside the realm of ordinary human nature, so far removed are Alexander's character and achievements from those possible for the average man. But in the juxtaposition of these two figures Mr. de Vere has produced a striking contrast of wide intellectual and moral bearings. Alexander touches earth in his love for his friend; Hephestion is ennobled by his preservation of every virtue, especially those distinctively Christian, of simplicity and humility, like Marcus Aurelius, even on the steps, as we may say, of an imperial throne. Alexander, like another Achilles, gathers around his person all the glories of intellect and of power which make him an incarnation of almost divine greatness; and, like Achilles, the dazzling brightness of his day is in imagination still more bright, because the night of death descended upon it all too soon and sudden, with no twilight interspace of lessening greatness to prepare the eye. Alexander may stand for us as the supreme power of intellect, soaring in contemplation, resistless in action, and the worshippers of mind could hardly enthrone a greater deity chosen from among mortals. Hephestion, around whose head play less dazzling lights than those of imperial intellect and power, is a type of moral grandeur, of the beauty of virtue. Mr. de Vere's design in this contrast was doubtless to make comparison between the Greek and the

Christian ideals, the glory of the mind and the greater glory of the soul.

It is barely conceivable that any careful student of this drama can assign to it a place second to any produced in the nineteenth century. Nearly all the great poets of the century have essayed drama; almost without exception they have failed. Scott's genius, supreme in narrative fiction, proved too discursive for dramatic bounds. Wordsworth failed because his intellect was contemplative, out of any close sympathy with action. Coleridge, metaphysician and mystic though he was, came nearer success, but did not reach it. Byron was too rigidly confined within the iron circle of his own personality to succeed in dramatic characterisation. Landor produced with the statuary's art noble groups of men and women, but could not call them from their pedestals into breathing life. Keats rioted in the glow and passion of colour and of music, and the Fates gave him no lease of life wherein to study the world that lay around him. Shelley achieved success in one instance, but his is a drama of hateful night unvisited by the blessed light of day. Tennyson, after a brilliant career in almost every other branch of the poetic art which raised high expectations, gained only a respectable mediocrity in this—the highest. The honours in nineteenth-century drama are all divided between

Sir Henry Taylor, Browning, and the de Veres, and to the de Veres the future should confirm the laurel. *Mary Tudor* and *Alexander the Great*, as we have said, rank side by side as the highest limits in the drama of action and of thought reached in later times. *Alexander* is full of fine, of memorable, of durable things; it is a poem large in conception, noble in execution. *Mary Tudor*, less striking in single lines and passages, less daring in its subject, has the processional movement suited to its subject, and in harmony with the traditions of English historical drama. Mr. de Vere's diction is richer and more varied than Sir Aubrey's, and rises in dignity with the difficulty of the theme. Alexander's address to his troops after the mutiny among them has been put down, beginning—

> 'Ye swineherds, and ye goatherds, and ye shepherds,
> That shamelessly in warlike garb usurped
> Your vileness cloak, my words are not for you;
> There stand among you others, soldiers' sons,
> Male hearts, o'erwrit with chronicles of war:
> To them I speak'—

is a truly magnificent oration, not unmatched, however, by passages from the same play, as where Alexander crowns the tomb of Achilles and apostrophises the dead hero, or where, looking out from the cliff opposite new Tyre, he sees in vision the city that was to bear his name, Alexandria.

'There the Euxine
Thaws in the hot winds from the Arabian gulfs,
There meet the East and West; dusk Indian kings
Thither shall send their ivory and their gold,
And thence to far Hesperia!'

The imagery is throughout poetic and arresting, as here, where Hephestion speaks of Philotas:—

'Coldness in youth is twice the cold of eld;
Beneath the ashes of a fire burnt out
Some heat may lurk; but from the unfuelled hearth
And dusk bars of a never-lighted fire
The chillness comes of death.'

Or here, where Philotas is awaiting death after condemnation, and has drawn from Phylax an oath to revenge him by the assassination of Hephestion:

'Remember!
An ice-film gathers on my shivering blood.
O happy days of youth! They'll laugh at me,
A shadow 'mid the shades, as I have laughed
At Homer's ghosts bending to victim blood,
A sieve-like throat incapable of joy!
Tell me these things are fables. I'd not live
A second time; for life's too dangerous!
We come from nothing; and another nothing,
A hoary Hunger, couchant at Death's gate
Waits to devour us.'

A critic's duty towards this play would be unfaithfully performed if he failed to call attention to the fine scenes in prose which it contains—scenes which, almost to a greater degree than those in

verse, fill the reader with admiration for the author's subtle psychological power and command over the resources of language.

Into Mr. de Vere's dramas, *Alexander the Great* and *St. Thomas of Canterbury*, enters a philosophical in addition to their historical, personal, and poetic interest. The hero of each figures forth in his own person a great world-moving idea, such ideas as emanate from individuals who stand head and shoulders above their fellows, are in advance of their own times, and often powerful agents in the development, so slow and yet so certain, of human society. To Alexander must be ascribed of right the first inception of the idea which in our day has become the familiar one of 'the parliament of man, the federation of the world.' He first conceived the possibility of a universal empire, which should embrace the nations and gather the whole human family under the rule of a single sceptre. It was not to be expected that he should conceive it as a commonwealth or as ruled by any other than its imperial founder. He would have thrown the peoples into the melting-pot of his own ambition, and created a terrestrial planetary system of nations, with himself as central sun. But the magnificence of the idea is scarcely marred by the splendid egotism of the man, who not alone conceived, but went far to realise it,

'to make,' in Dryden's fine phrase, 'one city of the universe.'

'Had he lived,' says Mr. de Vere, 'he must have created it. The Romans, whose legions with difficulty resisted the phalanx when wielded by Pyrrhus of Epirus, must have sunk, despite the patriotic confidence of Livy, before the conqueror. The imperial series would then have been far otherwise completed; the consummating empire, which resumed all its predecessors, inheriting their gifts, and exaggerating at once their good and their evil, the virtues that win power, and the earthly aim that degrades it, would have been an empire of Intellect, not of Law; and over its subject realms there would have been scattered, not Roman municipalities, but Greek schools.'

What the world has lost, what it may have gained, by the early death of the world-dissolving, world-creating Macedonian, who shall determine?

In the person of Becket, Mr. de Vere also represents an idea of wide-reaching national importance. Becket stands in the history of his epoch as representative of the Church, a moral power espousing the higher national interests against a tyrannous control, and so as a pillar of the people's cause, a pioneer in the movement towards true freedom and the higher civilisation. As a reformer of clerical abuses, one indeed regarded in his own day as secular in his views, and as defender of the Church against the Crown, he was in reality

the upholder and guardian of the cause of liberty, so hardly won in council-hall and tented field by the people of England from their hereditary kings.

The poetry of Mr. de Vere, to one fresh from the perusal of modern verse, seems almost over-weighted, overcharged with thought. The error, if error there be, lies certainly in excess rather than deficiency; he sows less with the hand than with the whole sack. Or it might be more truthfully said that the fault is in over-refinement, such refinement as can hardly be censured in itself, but is rarely achieved without expansion beyond the limits of emphasis, or without sacrifice of that breadth of effect which is essential to the highest beauties of verse. But though refined beyond necessity, the informing ideas of his poetry are never abstract, but spring spontaneously from some ground of universal experience, and are vitally connected with human feeling and the real world. Like the poetry of Wordsworth, it lives and moves in the peopled city of the pure humanities, not in the world of phantasy, derived, it may be, from ancient legend or saga, where we are 'housed in dreams.' It is poetry whose source is very near the heart, whose appeal needs not therefore to be couched in the language of exaggeration, so simple, direct, and winning are the truth and justice of

its natural claims. As with Wordsworth, too, the level of Mr. de Vere's verse is determined by its immediate subject; as the wind of inspiration blows strongly or faintly the verse rises or falls, but it must be noticed that the language remains the same throughout; it is never by trick of phrase or cunning effects of word-melody that Mr. de Vere's poetic power displays itself. The subjects of which he makes choice are subjects upon which he feels strongly and treats for their own sake, not merely such as afford facilities for poetic handling or the production of surprising beauties, that we may be induced to exclaim, 'How ingenious an artist!' It is poetry not by reason of its ornate splendour, but because its thoughts are sincere, its impulses spontaneous, its passion authentic.

It has been already observed that the poetry of the de Veres is characterised by its independence of contemporary fashion, than which there are few surer tests of true poetic genius. This alone gives interest to their work apart from success in the dramatic form, a form in which the representative poets of the century fell short. There is yet another field of poetry, cultivated indeed by many modern poets, but by few among the greatest with eminent success, in which the de Veres have attained a notable mastery. Minds of the discursive order, like Words-

worth's, working in the medium of measured language, are apt to run on to undue lengths, to spread their thought over too large a surface. For this reason Mr. de Vere, like Wordsworth, is indisputably at his best in the poems composed in fixed forms; in the drama, because compression is essential, and in 'the sonnet's scanty plot of ground,' where prolixity is impossible. A poet who is exclusively a poet, whose business in life is poetry, naturally pours into verse all his impressions of life, makes the Muse his *confidante* in small matters as in great. But enduring poetry is occasional: it comes into being at unexpected moments only when a perfect balance of mind and heart are attained, when speech and idea are in the closest harmony. Throughout a long poem it is barely possible that this perfect harmony can remain unbroken. A strict form, such as that of the drama or the sonnet, seems to aid some poets, compelling them to a severer guard over themselves than they care to exercise when moving in freer, more liberal forms. In the art of sonnet-writing Mr. de Vere inherited to the full his father's genius. If less massive than the sonnets of Sir Aubrey, Mr. de Vere's are as delicately chiselled, are more varied in melody, and embrace a wider range of subject. Of his father's sonnets, some by their weight of thought and correspond-

ing dignity of movement remind us of the organ note to be heard in Milton's

'Captain, or Colonel, or Knight at Arms,'

or in his

'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints';

while in singleness or unity of effect, in chaste beauty of language, others can best be compared with Wordsworth's. Of the one hundred sonnets in the volume published in 1875, many deal with aspects of scenery, in the main Irish; some may be classed among poems inspired by patriotism, others among those inspired by religious feeling. Take this as an example of the grave splendour for which almost all are conspicuous:—

GOUGAUN BARRA.

'Not beauty which men gaze on with a smile,
Not grace that wins, no charm of form or hue,
Dwelt with that scene. Sternly upon my view,
And slowly—as the shrouding clouds awhile
Disclosed the beetling crag and lonely isle—
From their dim lake the ghostly mountains grew,
Lit by one slanting ray. An eagle flew
From out the gloomy gulf of the defile,
Like some sad spirit from Hades. To the shore
Dark waters rolled, slow heaving, with dull moan;
The foam-flakes hanging from each livid stone
Like froth on deathful lips; pale mosses o'er
The shattered cell crept, as an orphan lone
Clasps his cold mother's breast when life is gone.'

Or this, as representative of the sonnets dealing with national themes:—

THE TRUE BASIS OF POWER.

'Power's footstool is Opinion, and his throne
The Human Heart; thus only kings maintain
Prerogatives God-sanctioned. The coarse chain
Tyrants would bind around us may be blown
Aside, like foam, that with a breath is gone:
For there 's a tide within the popular vein
That despots in their pride may not restrain,
Swoln with a vigour that is all its own.

Ye who would steer along these doubtful seas,
Lifting your proud sails to high heaven, beware!
Rocks throng the waves, and tempests load the breeze;
Go search the shores of History—mark there
The Oppressor's lot, the Tyrant's destinies;
Behold the wrecks of ages, and despair!'

Mr. de Vere, in his memoir of his father, tells us that

'The sonnet was with him to the last a favourite form of composition. This taste was fostered by the magnificent sonnets of Wordsworth, whose genius he had early hailed, and whose friendship he regarded as one of the chief honours of his later life. For his earlier sonnets he had found a model chiefly in the Italian poets, especially Petrarch and Filicaja. Like Filicaja also, who so well deserved the inscription graven on his tomb, "qui gloriam literarum honestavit," he valued the sonnet the more because its austere brevity, its severity, and its majestic completeness fit it especially for the loftier themes of song.'

It may be remarked, however, that the sonnet

has been in recent years so assiduously cultivated as a poetic form, so much careful attention has been given to the minutest details of its structure, and, as a result, such metrical perfection is now required of the writer of sonnets, that many of Sir Aubrey de Vere's most finished poems in this form might from one point of view be regarded as inferior to those of poets not comparable with him. Mr. de Vere had the advantage of experience not open to his father, and his work has perhaps gained in technical qualities. He is best known probably as a sonneteer, and it will be sufficient, therefore, to quote two from his many faultless poems cast in this mould. The first is very characteristic of the refinement, the grave wisdom, the stateliness of his mind.

SORROW.

'Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee; do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;
And ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;
Then lay before him all thou hast; allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
The soul's marmoreal calmness; grief should be
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate;
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;
Strong to consume small troubles, to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.'

The following in a different key displays the ample sweep of his imagination :—

THE SUN-GOD.

'I saw the Master of the Sun. He stood
High in his luminous car, himself more bright;
An archer of immeasurable might:
On his left shoulder hung his quivered load;
Spurned by his steeds the Eastern mountains glowed;
Forward his eager eye, and brow of light
He bent; and while both hands that arch embowed,
Shaft after shaft pursued the flying night.
No wings profaned that god-like form; around
His neck high-held an ever-moving crowd
Of locks hung glistening; while such perfect sound
Fell from his bowstring, that th' ethereal dome
Thrilled as a dewdrop, and each passing cloud
Expanded, whitening like the ocean foam.'

I have dwelt thus long upon the dramatic quality, the solidity of substance, the wealth and melody of language to be found in Mr. de Vere's poetry, because it seems to be popularly supposed that he is a poet of purely meditative mood whose sympathies are almost exclusively engaged with aspects of religious faith or aspiration. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the work of the poetic sire and son alike there is a healthy variety of interests, a hearty appreciation of all that can gladden or beautify or ennoble life, a fulness of pulse such as rarely beats in the poetry of mature life, and is conspicuously absent in the

pessimistic period we have lately traversed. The enthusiasms of Mr. de Vere's nature have free course; its joys and sorrows, noble in themselves, have a noble outpouring in his verse, and not seldom does it render with perfect fidelity the inmost cry of the heart—

> 'When the ploughshare of deeper passion
> Tears down to our primitive rock.'

Next to Browning's, Mr. de Vere's poetry shows, it may be said without exaggeration, the fullest vitality, resumes the largest sphere of ideas, covers the broadest intellectual field since the poetry of Wordsworth. But with his versatility of manner and wealth of ideas he has not combined that poetic parsimony which gives only of its best, and which has its reward at the hands of time. Had he been less facile, it is probable that his reputation as a poet would have been higher. Only the diligent student of poetry cares to discover for himself the pleasantest places in a poet's garden. If it be a garden so carefully cultivated as that of Gray or Tennyson, where every inch of ground has been scrupulously tended, where the poet has, to change the metaphor, been his own editor and made his own selections, the visitors will be more numerous and the critics disarmed ere they enter the sacred enclosure. With poets like Browning and Words-

worth, the part is often greater than the whole, and in these days of many writers only the choicest work of an author can hope for survival. Most of the poets of our own times and those to come will be read only in anthologies, and brief space will be granted to few among them save the highest. Were a judicious selection made from Mr. de Vere's poetry —neither of the two already published is in all respects satisfactory—the critic of the future will view with some astonishment a verdict of the present which ranks before it a volume by any living writer.

It has been sufficiently proved that Mr. de Vere is an original author. Alone among living poets he certainly stands, if only by reason of the strikingly impersonal character of his work. Like Byron and Tennyson, the later singers are rarely successful save when intensely personal, when they depict moods they have themselves experienced. It will be granted, however, that by far the highest triumphs of imaginative art are achieved by those poets, rare indeed in their appearance, whose sphere of operation is not limited by the narrow boundary of a single life's experience, but who cast themselves abroad upon universal human nature, sound its depths and shallows, sympathise with its multiform interests, and entering through knowledge and native insight into the long history of man, are, in

a very positive sense, citizens of the world rather than the slaves of environment in any age or country. Mr. de Vere has indeed lived abroad, a mental life untrammelled by space or time, of singular variety and depth; but perhaps he has felt himself most in unison, and, it may be, almost desired to make his home with the ages which he characterises as eminently Christian ages, when life was at once gay and serious, represented in one aspect by Dante, the most spiritual of poets, and in another by Chaucer, the most mirthful and human-hearted.

In these latter days of science and scientific inquiry, necessary progress has done much to remove into the region of discarded legend and mystic unreality many of the largest and most penetrating conceptions, many of the noblest truths regarding it that could inform and illuminate human life. In that body of Mr. de Vere's work which we may call distinctively religious, as dealing with the spiritual in man, he has chosen for poetic treatment certain great spiritual conceptions, and has illustrated them at work in the formation of saintly character, producing lovely and perfect lives, and as productive of that self-forgetfulness, the passionate surrender to the service of humanity, of those who, 'loving God, loved man the more,' which shines in the devoted missionary labours of the

ancient Roman and Celtic churches. The gladsome and luminous wisdom, the child's heart within the man's maturer mind, the quiet yet expectant trustfulness that belongs to unquestioning faith, the intense glow of an unquenchable fire of aspiration—these are but dim and remote to us in a season that seems by contrast the dull November of the world. So wise are we grown that we can scarce be joyful, and, though heirs of all the ages, can reduce only a small portion of our patrimony into actual ownership. Mr. de Vere would have us recover the ancient wealth of our fathers, while we retained what is exclusively our own; and in his verse the neglected truths, once in actual possession of the Christian peoples, are finely emphasised. In reading Mr. de Vere's *Legends of the Saxon Saints*, *Mediæval Records*, and *Legends of St. Patrick*, the uppermost feeling must be—a feeling which Mr. de Vere was doubtless desirous of inspiring—how much our material and scientific progress, our advance in civilisation, has cost us. That there have been compensating gains Mr. de Vere would be the first to insist, but the loss is no less certain. It would seem that the human race lies under the blighting necessity of paying for its greatest gains by the abandonment of other and no less priceless possessions. In a fine poem written at Lugano, we have Mr. de Vere's message to the present age:—

'Teach us in all that round us lies
To see and feel each hour
More than Homeric majesties,
And more than Phidian power;
Teach us the coasts of modern life
With lordlier tasks are daily rife

Than theirs who plunged the heroic oar
Of old by Chersonese;
But bid our Argo launch from shore
Unbribed by golden Fleece:
Bid us Dædalean arts to scorn
Which prostituted ends suborn!

That science—slave of sense—which claims
No commerce with the sky,
Is baser thrice than that which aims
With waxen wings to fly!
To grovel, or self-doomed to soar—
Mechanic age, be proud no more!'

Of that department of Mr. de Vere's work dealing with chivalry, the lives of saints and the records of the Christian Church, I omit a lengthened criticism with the less regret since this part of his work is most widely known. To a volume of selections recently published under the editorship of Mr. Woodberry an appreciative and excellent essay stands as preface, in which full justice is done to these Christian poems.

'They succeed one another as the poet's memory wanders back to the legends of the Empire on the first establishment of the faith in Roman lands and along

Asian shores, or moves through mediæval times with Joan of Arc and episodes of the Cid that recall Cuchullain in their light-hearted performance of natural deeds, now under the Cross. The beauty of these separate stories is equable and full of a softened charm; but in them too, as in the Bardic myths, there abides that distance of time which makes them remote, as if they were not of our own. They are highly pictorial; and in reading them, each secluded in that silent, old-world air that encompasses it, one feels that here is a modern poet, like those early painters of pious heart who spent their lives in picturing scenes from the life of Christ; and one recalls, perhaps, some Convent of San Marco, where each monastic cell bears on its quiet walls such scenes from the shining hand of the Florentine on whose face fell heaven's mildest light. These poems of Aubrey de Vere—to characterise them largely—are scenes from the life of Christ in man; and there is something in them—in their gladness, their luminousness, their peace—which suggests Frà Angelico, the halo of Christian art.'

Before taking final leave of Mr. de Vere, I would illustrate by one quotation the felicity with which he moves in lighter and more lyric measure. There are few poets of the present generation, despite their almost exclusive devotion to the lyric Muse, who can write more charming verse.

'In Spring, when the breast of the lime-grove gathers
Its roseate cloud; when the flushed streams sing,
And the mavis tricks her in gayer feathers;
Read Chaucer then; for Chaucer is Spring!

On lonely evenings in dull Novembers,
When rills run choked under skies of lead,
And on forest-hearths the year's last embers,
Wind-heaped and glowing, lie, yellow and red;

Read Chaucer still! In his ivied beaker
With knights and wood-gods, and saints embossed,
Spring hides her head till the wintry breaker
Thunders no more on the far-off coast.'

And there have been few poets since Coleridge passed over to the great majority who have touched a string which so nearly recalls the enchantments of his magic harp as Mr. de Vere in his magnificent Autumnal Ode.

'It is the Autumnal Epode of the year:
The Nymphs that urge the seasons on their round,
They to whose green lap flies the startled deer
When bays the far-off hound,
They that drag April by the rain-bright hair,
Though sun-showers daze her and the rude winds scare,
O'er March's frosty bound,
They by whose warm and furtive hand unwound
The cestus falls from May's new-wedded breast,
Silent they stand beside dead Summer's bier,
With folded palms and faces to the West,
And their loose tresses sweep the dewy ground.

A sacred stillness hangs upon the air,
A sacred clearness. Distant shapes draw nigh:
Glistens yon Elm grove, to its heart laid bare,
And all articulate in its symmetry,
With here and there a branch that from on high
Far flashes washed in wan and watery gleam;
Beyond, the glossy lake lies calm—a beam
Upheaved, as if in sleep, from its slow central stream.

This quiet, is it Truth, or some fair mask?
 Is pain no more? Shall sleep be lord, not Death?
Shall sickness cease to afflict and overtask
 The spent and labouring breath?
Is there, 'mid all yon forms and fields, this day
 No grey old head that drops? no darkening eye?
Spirits of Pity, lift your hands and pray—
 Each hour, alas, men die!'

We cannot recall from English literary history such true poetic genius exhibited in the work of both father and son, as in that of Sir Aubrey and Mr. Aubrey de Vere. It is a unique instance of the inheritance of high poetic power—a power which, in another member of the family working in a different field, has displayed itself in the admirable translations of Horace (by far the most perfect we possess) of Sir Stephen de Vere, Mr. de Vere's elder brother. The de Vere constellation is a bright and arresting object among the greater and the lesser stars of the century. The value of poetry such as has been given us by the de Vere family is perhaps greater to-day than ever before. It recalls us from the inconsiderable details which life and livelihood impose upon the majority of men. It frees from the dreary round of commonplace, from the mechanical, dream-like walk through life. To take up this poetry is for most men to step out of the narrow, circumscribed circle of their daily tasks and conversation into free air under the open eye of

heaven. It gives a clue to the inner and seldom-sounded depths of the soul, to the possibilities that are latent in the character, the powers hid beneath the surface, it supports the reason that follows, the soul that aspires towards the intellectual, the spiritual view of things. It fortifies, amid much that disheartens in modern life, the divine spirit in man.

THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

Criticism, it is complained, moves but haltingly after the pioneer of genius, and the boundaries of art are enlarged in its despite. We have, therefore, in criticism a somewhat discredited science. The judgment indisputably takes a colour, consciously or unconsciously, from the kind of excellence with which it is familiar; in excellence of an unfamiliar type there lurks a bewildering and baffling element. We are on the whole right in thinking that the laws of art are written in the practices of the great artists; we are right too in conceiving the grammar of criticism as in large measure a system derived from these practices; we fail when we assume that the book of practices is closed and that the grammar as it exists is final. One may thus account for the great historical mistakes of criticism, for its inefficiency in dealing with an original writer who indulges in novel and unfamiliar practices, and justifies them only by his results. Criticism like that of Dr. Johnson, a criticism of fixed and external standards we may

call it, can never, even when supported by sound learning and robust good sense, be altogether trustworthy. It is never free of the danger that it may be discredited by the event. The search for a definitive, a final canon of criticism must therefore be futile; the closing chapter of the history of art, like the history of language, cannot be written. But despair of finding such a final canon need not drive us into the wilderness of private tastes and individual opinions. We may perhaps, in the end, attain to an *apparatus criticus* which, while it formulates a general demand, will leave art practically unfettered in its choice of methods; we may yet lay down a system of criticism which shall be possessed of a touchstone universally applicable, but free to enlarge its grammar of practices. Out of the chaos produced by the flamboyant individualism of latter-day criticism we may in time see an order emerge, though no prophet has proclaimed the day of its coming as at hand. In the present state of criticism it is plain that no view taken of an author possesses any authority beyond that of the individual who presents it; there exists no final court of appeal in matters of art. Yet when a writer has gained the attention of a considerable body of cultivated opinion, one is desirous, and naturally desirous, to test his performance by some deep-lying and permanent principles, to determine if possible

whether his eminence is real, or an apparent eminence due to our proximity to the object; in a word, to anticipate the verdict of posterity. By an imperious intellectual necessity we are driven to compare the achievements of our own day and generation with those of the past. And because no other body of principles exists which formulates a consistent demand, it is perhaps best, even when dealing with an author who disregards conventions, to make an appeal to the broad principles of ancient art, or to take these at least as the most fitting point of departure in any attempted critical estimate. 'They at any rate knew what they wanted in art, and we do not.' For this reason Matthew Arnold in his search for what was sound and true in poetical art found the only sure guidance among the ancients. 'They at any rate knew what they wanted in art, and we do not.' We do not know what we want in art, nor is it a matter of any importance, we seem now to be told; we do not greatly need to know. The writer will write as he pleases, and the business of the critic will be merely to note characteristics, 'as a chemist notes some natural element.' The author and his work stand to the critic as Nature and her phenomena stand to the man of science. There is no room left for the expression of dissatisfaction, there can be no inequalities in art. Like nature,

art too is perfect. 'Perfection is equal,' writes one of Mr. Meredith's disciples, 'and all art stands on the equality of perfection.' How luminous a saying! What insight, what sagacity! Here is the only and the true simplification of criticism, henceforth to consist in the selection of superlatives, since the praise of perfection cannot be adequately conducted save in superlatives. But a writer of Mr. Meredith's calibre is not served by criticism such as this suited to the ceremonial which accompanies the canonisation of the minor poet or the decadent. He is not served by this inability to perceive distinctions, to discriminate, to appraise with justice; he is not served by a gracious readiness to accept all art as on the equality of perfection. A writer of Mr. Meredith's genius is better served by principles of criticism which narrow the circle than by these sweeping circuits of magnificent inclusiveness. Though his worth and influence are yet uncalculated, the curve of his orbit yet undetermined, there is that about Mr. Meredith which distinguishes his from the lesser writers. He is very evidently not of their company, though he has yet to attain a secure niche in the national imagination. Mr. Meredith is not the people's favourite, and no extravagances of critical appreciation will ever make him their favourite, but he is a figure of sufficient importance

to suggest the application to his work of the severest tests, such tests as need only be applied to writers who challenge comparison with the best literary artists, not of their own day alone but of England. And, however it may be with writers of whom we think and speak as accomplished rather than creative, questions of technique are not the first questions that arise in connection with such an author. An author who challenges comparison with the classics of our own or any other literature does so on broader ground than the finish or perfume of his sentences.

'Is there not in field, wood, or shore something more precious and tonic than any special beauties we may chance to find there—flowers, perfumes, sunsets —something that we cannot do without, though we can do without these? Is it health, life, power, or what is it?'

Form is a vital matter in literature—it will not do to disregard it, it is a vital matter; but the Aristotelian canon lays its first emphasis upon form in the sense of architectonics rather than in the sense of finish of detail. And if we are to judge of Mr. Meredith's achievement by classic canons, it is well for him that it is so.

As a novelist, and it is as a novelist that Mr. Meredith claims the most serious attention—as a novelist he is a worker in a field not directly re-

cognised in the ancient world as a legitimate sphere for the literary artist. But within the present century Fiction has made a kind of triumphal progress from village maiden to reigning beauty at the Court. Her charms compel universal homage. She has taken without protest a place beside poetry, the drama, and history, as a branch of art, hardly if at all of inferior dignity. She has usurped the place of these older literary arts in public favour. This position she has achieved while still in her artistic youth. She has enlarged the sphere of her influence, and is likely still further to enlarge it, for she draws to herself every variety of talent, and offers it an open field. In the novel we have the formal world into which much of the best creative energy of the century has been directed; and in his choice of the novel as the best medium for his own imaginative work Mr. Meredith followed a true guiding instinct. Here the peculiarities of his methods detract less from the effectiveness of his work than in his poetry. Traditions and conventions are of less weight in fiction than in any other department of literary art, and of this fact Mr. Meredith has taken advantage. Nevertheless, and in spite of his indifference to literary traditions, many of the qualities of Mr. Meredith's work are classic qualities. The novel may be regarded as a drama

written out in full for fireside readers, with occasional comments by the Chorus in the person of the author. Mr. Meredith's novels are in every sense dramas, usually comedies or tragi-comedies, but essentially dramatic in presentation. If we make a demand upon the modern novelist in the person of Mr. Meredith such as was made upon the ancient Greek dramatist, a demand for design, and again design, and yet again design, we shall not find an absence of design, we shall not find even a weakness, but a positive largeness, a breadth of design, which at once distinguishes him as a writer of no ordinary note. The breadth of design in his works forbids any question as to his intellectual eminence. It is when he attempts to execute his design that he is less successful. To anticipate in a measure what must be the concluding judgment on Mr. Meredith, we may say that his design is usually noble and spacious, but it is never wholly extricated. It is extricated in parts, but in the main, like some colossal sphinx, it lies half-buried in the desert sand.

That Mr. Meredith has not been altogether successful is not indeed surprising; the task he has set himself in each one of his greater novels is a task of vastly greater magnitude than that undertaken, let us say, by Euripides in his *Hecuba* or *Ion*. The canvas is a larger one, the types of

character more subtle and complex, the issues more involved, the action no less important. If one has to complain that Mr. Meredith's designs are less completely extricated than those of his predecessors who have created the traditions of art, if at times they are not in any respect set free, it is only just to bear in mind the magnitude of his intellectual undertakings. The character of Mr. Meredith's drama must also be borne in mind. It is the drama of conduct and of motives, the inner springs of conduct; of character evolved by varying sets of circumstances and amid the mutual relations, actions, and reactions of human life. He is, besides, the chronicler of the subtle and elusive fluctuations of emotion, the ebb and flow of feeling, the alternations of moods that make a theatre of the human heart. Present as spectator of this subjective play of swiftly passing moods, he delights to publish the secrets whispered on that inner stage, to draw aside at certain critical moments, in certain critical situations, the curtain that makes it invisible to the physical eye. It is not merely what his personages do, but how and what they feel, that interests Mr. Meredith; he is the novelist who most faithfully records the phases of that inner, partly even subconscious life which, viewed from without, we denominate character or temperament. The psychological forest Mr. Meredith is not the first

to enter, but no previous author has penetrated it so deeply. One, and not the least, of his distinctions, therefore, is to have added to art a new province legitimately reclaimed for future cultivation by his successors.

In his methods, too, Mr. Meredith, if not without precursors, has pushed beyond the limits of tradition. He is content to indicate rather than to describe, to suggest rather than to paint a picture, 'to rouse the inward vision' rather than elaborate a finished masterpiece. These are the characteristics which remind Mr. Meredith's readers of Browning. Like Browning he is content to depend upon his reader to a larger degree than perhaps the majority of present-day readers are prepared to bear. Thus Mr. Meredith and Mr. Browning, declining to pipe to popular airs, haughtily impose a test upon their audiences. They trust to the sympathy and to the intelligence of the faithful few, they make words their servants, nor suffer themselves by any overscrupulous regard for form to become the slaves of their own vocabularies. Mr. Meredith's interests and methods may be thus briefly indicated, but the spirit of his work, the leaven that leavens it, resides in his apprehension of life as a tragi-comedy, as a subject for 'thoughtful laughter.' Mr. Meredith —σπουδογέλοιος—conceives that there exists no need to distort or dislocate human life, to view it

in concave or convex mirrors, in order to present a picture which will afford a smile to the wise student of the spectacle. 'The Comic Spirit, which is the perceptive, is the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim to the powers of laughter.' Mr. Meredith is the willing servitor of the Comic Muse.

'Thine is the service, thine the sport
This shifty heart of ours to hunt
Across its webs and round the many a ring
Where fox it is, or snake, or mingled seeds
Occasion heats to shape, or the poor smoke
Struck from a puff-ball, or the troughster's grunt.'

But the Comic Muse knows her limitations. There are sights at which she does not laugh; and in the presence of Sincerity she spreads her wings. You may even love and not call a smile to her features. 'If she watches over sentimentalism with a birch-rod, she is not opposed to romance. You may love, and warmly too, as long as you are honest. Do not offend reason.' There are causes, Mr. Meredith will tell us, for tears as well as laughter.

'For this the Comic Muse extracts of creatures
Appealing to the fount of tears; that they
Strive never to outleap our human features
And do right reason's ordinance obey,
In peril of the hum to laughter nighest.
But prove they under stress of action's fire
Nobleness, to that test of Reason highest
She bows; she waves them for the loftier lyre.'

In the main, however, Mr. Meredith finds that there is more of comedy than tragedy in the world, or he has found in himself a riper faculty for its representation. The tragedy that follows hard upon the heels of comedy in human life he does not exclude as a subject for his art; but he usually declines to dwell upon it, to bring it into the foreground of his representation. Comedy occupies the foreground in Mr. Meredith's drama of life. And of the supreme tragedy of love deflowered he would have us believe that Shakespeare himself, master of human nature, had no knowledge.

> 'Thence came the honeyed corner at his lips,
> The conquering smile wherein his spirit sails
> Calm as the God who the white sea wave whips,
> Yet full of speech and intershifting tales,
> Close mirrors of us; thence had he the laugh
> We feel is thine; broad as ten thousand beeves
> At pasture!'

In Mr. Meredith's drama of life comedy occupies the foreground; yet, when the issues are the issues of tragedy, it cannot be said that his power is less apparent. The tragic argument is not too high for him; but he is at all times a stranger to that vulgar insistence upon grief, that call to tears, that protracted demand for pity which so often masquerades as tragedy or as pathos.

'Concerning pathos,' as he tells us in the opening

chapter of *The Egoist*, 'no ship can now set sail without pathos; and we are not totally deficient of pathos. . . . The Egoist surely inspires pity. He who would desire to clothe himself at everybody's expense, and is of that desire condemned to strip himself stark naked, he, if pathos ever had a form, might be taken for the actual person. Only he is not allowed to rush at you, roll you over, and squeeze your body for the briny drops. There is the innovation.'

But this innovation of Mr. Meredith's, this reluctance to force tears from us, to compel us to a luxury of grief, is construed by some so as to yield a theory akin to the feminine theory in respect of Thackeray —that he, too, is a cynic, or if not a cynic, at least deficient in heart. It is a theory to be summarily dismissed. We have no fear in the company of those who speak freely of their grief, in the company of those whose recital is accompanied by tears. In such company we can remain masters of our own emotions. But there are others who feel widely and deeply, and through excess or intensity of emotion do not trust themselves to speak, or, when they speak, preserve a calm or even a cheerful countenance; this is dangerous company for those whose emotions are 'tickle o' the sere.' Composed features furnish but a shallow argument that the heart does not bleed. And indeed not one of the popular titles will fit Mr. Meredith, not cynic, nor pessimist, nor sceptic.

The popular ethical codes, too, will not serve; he is not to be parcelled out by the Liliputian measuring-tapes. Not realist nor idealist, but both; a writer who appeals in his own fine phrase to 'the conscience residing in thoughtfulness,' who is on the side of unwearying, inextinguishable effort, whose ethics are the simple ethics of a faith in all heroic enterprises.

Mr. Meredith entered the field of authorship between the publication of *Pendennis* and that of *Henry Esmond*, in 1851, the year after the publication of *In Memoriam*, and entered it, not as a novelist, but as a poet. It was not until five years later that he made his first appearance as a prose writer, in *The Shaving of Shagpat*, a fantasy less likely to attract than to bewilder even a conciliatory public. No reader of Mr. Meredith's early verses, however gifted with critical second-sight, could have foreseen the author of *The Egoist*, or *Diana of the Crossways*, either in the strong or in the weak poems contained in that first volume.

'Summer glows warm on the meadows; then come let us roam thro' them gaily,
Heedless of heat and the hot-kissing sun, and the fear of dark freckles. . . .
Come, and like bees we will gather the rich golden honey of noontide;
Deep in the sweet summer meadows, bordered by hillside and river

Lined with long trenches half-hidden, where sweetest the smell of white meadowsweet
Blissfully hovers—O sweetest ! but pluck it not ! even in the tenderest
Grasp it will lose breath and wither; like many not made for a posy.'

There is not much indication here of the later and more characteristic manner. This was written in the years before Mr. Meredith had taught himself to write love-speeches like this:—

'So in love with you that on my soul your happiness was my marrow—whatever you wished; anything you chose. It's reckoned a fool's part. No, it's love; the love of a woman—the one woman! I was like the hand of a clock to the springs. I taught this old watch-dog of a heart to keep guard, and bury the bones you tossed him.'

Or to inform his readers of a simple fact in this fashion:—

'Algernon waited dinnerless until the healthy-going minutes distended and swelled monstrous and horrible as viper-bitten bodies, and the venerable Signior Time became of unhealthy hue.'

Or to set them problems like this:—

'The talk fell upon our being creatures of habit. She said, "It is there that we see ourselves crutched between love grown old and indifference ageing to love."'

Yet, like that of all great writers, Mr. Meredith's

style has charm, a something analogous to the expression which accompanies the words of the speaker, and lends to them the interest of his personality. Mr. Meredith's style has charm, but an occasional, a fitful charm. We do not contend that there is a hidden grace in such phrases as 'her meditations tottered in dots,' 'swings suspended on a scarce credible guess,' 'infrigidated a congenial atmosphere by an overflow of exclamatory wonderment,' 'women whose bosoms can be tombs,' or 'Her head performed the negative,' or 'resumed its brushing negative,' or in any of the phrases usually quoted in derision of Mr. Meredith's style. For a deliberate artist he can be terribly uncouth, but though eccentricities may mar a character, though they may mar a style, they are not necessarily inconsistent with charm. Mr. Meredith plays the coquette with his readers, and estranges them, that he may display his power of reducing them once again to subjection. In *Shagpat*, for example, though he bewilders he fascinates, and *Shagpat* is one of his most typical works. Here is a fairy tale, the only fairy tale, we have been assured by one of their best students, which, produced in an age of culture, fully conforms to the folk-tale convention. How characteristic of its author to set himself so herculean a task, to court a failure and to achieve a triumph. Much of the charm of Mr. Meredith's

style consists in this, that it is suffused with poetry. He began as poet, and it is not difficult, more especially perhaps in his transcripts of Nature, to discover the poet behind the novelist. Passage after passage will recur to his readers in which he has rendered with a poet's fidelity, with a poet's felicity, the more elusive aspects of a scene, its air and sky. No poet has with more penetrating insight realised the unity, the larger harmony, which without moral or spiritual loss includes man in Nature. The atmosphere of Nature's varying moods, and their magnetic influences upon the soul, these, the proofs of that harmony, he has set himself to delineate in his verse. The subtle effluences of a morn of May, the autumnal chill of November that damps to the bone, the virago morn on which the wind has teeth and claws, all these he is glad to have known, they belong to the great order of things. And because he is a poet Mr. Meredith is the closest observer of Nature among all our novelists, the closest observer and the most minute painter among them.

'February blew south-west for the pairing of the birds. A broad warm wind rolled clouds of every ambiguity of form in magnitude over peeping azure, or skimming upon lakes of blue and lightest green, or piling the amphitheatre for majestic sunset.'

'Rain was universal; a thick robe of it swept from

hill to hill; thunder rumbled remote, and between the ruffled roars, the downpour pressed on the land, with a great noise of eager gobbling.'

'South-western rain-clouds are never long sullen . . . they rise and take veiled features in long climbing watery lines; at any moment they may break the veil and show soft upper cloud, show sun on it, show sky, green near the verge they spring from, of the green of grass in early dew.'

But if Mr. Meredith's transcripts of Nature belong to poetry, there are passages in his description of women that belong to it no less. His admirers are indeed always willing to stake his reputation upon the boyishness of his boys, and the womanhood of his women. And they are not wrong. The author of *Richard Feverel* and *Harry Richmond* is without doubt a supreme delineator of boyhood; he has probed it to the centre. And despite the reservations it is necessary to make in respect of Mr. Meredith as a literary artist, one must register a conviction that in his portraiture of women he is without a rival among English novelists. The reference to Shakespeare made in this connection by Mr. Meredith's admirers is a trite one, but it is not unwarrantable. When one thinks of Shakespeare's women, and the wonderful procession begins to pass before the eye of the mind, it is difficult to believe that anything at all comparable will ever be seen again. And indeed nothing at all

comparable ever will be seen again. Yet if one thinks of some of them singly: of Juliet, who could 'teach the torches to burn bright'; of Constance, who 'will instruct her sorrows to be proud'; of Portia, 'the true and honourable wife' of Brutus; of Rosalind the forest-maid, who plays the forester with such consummate delicacy and grace; of Perdita the country child, as fresh and beautiful as her own flowers drenched in the bright dews of heaven; of Viola the silent, of Olivia the stately, of Cleopatra, who could 'make death proud to take her'—if we call up to memory some of these marvellous portraits by Shakespeare, though the possibility of any general comparison dies away with the mere mental enumeration, it may yet perhaps justly be said, that among Mr. Meredith's portraits there are some which the fierce light of the comparison cannot injure, there are some imagined and presented so similarly that we are even forced to make it. Letitia Dale, 'with the romantic tale upon her eyelashes'; Clara Middleton, 'the dainty rogue in porcelain,' 'who gives one an idea of the mountain echo'; Diana, all air and fire, worthy the name of the quivered goddess; Renée with her southern blood and wilful graces; Emilia, the simple girl and passionate patriot; Lucy, a fairy princess, a magic enchantment to the eyes of the new Ferdinand; the soft-eyed star of love, Ottilia,

noble in heart and name;—to deny that these are near of kin to the women of Shakespeare is indeed possible, but Justice and the Graces forbid it.

We have said that the poet in Mr. Meredith is displayed in his transcripts from Nature and in his descriptions of women no less. Perhaps in that love idyll, the chapter in *Richard Feverel* entitled 'A Diversion, played on a Penny Whistle,' the best that prose can do to blend in one unforgettable strain the full enchantment of summer and the golden joys of young hearts that love has been done. Perhaps it would be difficult to find elsewhere the like sympathetic intensity of description, so marvellous a power of realising with so marvellous a power of rendering into words in their prose order the mingled flame and mystery and ecstasy that surround as with a shimmering magic haze the early hours of a great passion. Here is a fragment from one of his chapters in *Richard Feverel*, which are unsurpassed and unsurpassable:—

'And so it was with the damsel that knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue; from a dewy copse standing dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note; the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers; a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude; a boat slipped towards her containing a

dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild-flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting—a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew Nature as at the meeting of two electric clouds.'

There is little need to go further for proof of Mr. Meredith's right to rank with the greater novelists of the century in point of literary or dramatic skill; here at least he is the equal of most men, but as a student of human nature he is the master of most. The absence of sentimentality, the absence of mawkishness, from Mr. Meredith's descriptions of the relations of men and women, his quiet adherence to the facts, is not one of the least attractions of his books. Mr. Meredith is never more secure in his grasp of reality than when on difficult or dangerous ground. The question of the sex-relation is indeed what he would himself call a crucible question—he speaks somewhere of a 'crucible woman,' a woman in whose presence one is quickly resolved into one's component parts. In dealing with the sex-relation so many of our novelists, otherwise undetected, have

betrayed the unhealthy mind. It is the rock upon which so many have split, and not a few while flying white-cross colours of a lofty creed. Of one of his own women he says:—

'She gave him [her lover] comprehension of the meaning of love—a word in many mouths not often explained. With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth, the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction.'

It would be difficult to better such a description. Of another he says with admirable frankness: 'She was not pure of nature; it may be that we breed saintly souls which are; she was pure of will; fire rather than ice.' It ought to be observed that Mr. Meredith's heroines belong almost without exception to the class which finds in the conditions of modern life something from which they would escape, something that under all their gracious acceptance of things as they are they endure with difficulty. By certain subtle signs they perceive that they are still under the physical yoke. Though born within the cage they have hints of freedom—strange, half-understood longings for emancipation, and the gilt upon the bars does not deceive them.

'Men may have doubled Seraglio point; they have not yet rounded Cape Turk.'

'Women are in the position of inferiors. They are hardly out of the nursery when a lasso is round their necks; and if they have beauty, no wonder they turn it to a weapon and make as many captives as they can.'

According to Mr. Meredith women are still creatures of the chase, preyed upon by primitive man. And for those who do not feel or who positively extract a pleasure from their subjection, as for those who are unconscious that they are in captivity, Mr. Meredith exhibits a frank contempt. 'The humbly-knitting housewife, unquestionably worshipful of her lord,' the virginal ninny, she who has 'worn a mask of ignorance to be named innocent,' she who is χειροήθης, or in the language of men is 'essentially feminine,' of these types he is not enamoured, hardly even interested in them, and of these he draws but few portraits. They have indeed had their day, these heroines of twenty thousand fictions; they have been beloved of many novelists, and by not a few, it must be acknowledged, among those of even the greatest name. But they lack Mr. Meredith's praise. To those women he turns 'who have shame of their sex, who realise that they cannot take a step without becoming bond-women,' to those whose wings beat

against the bars of their prison-house, 'who muse on actual life and fatigue with the exercise of their brains and traffic in ideas,' to these 'princesses of their kind and time, albeit foreign ones and speaking a language distinct from the mercantile,' to these women Mr. Meredith turns for his heroines. The majority of them are either actually insubordinate or chafing. They are splendid wild creatures: not tamed, even untamable, and for this very reason dear to him; the true type of womanhood, spiritually free, and bidding defiance to the mere primitive hunter from the inaccessible resorts of their own natures.

As he has broken through the conventional treatment of sex problems, so he has broken through the traditional, the conventional treatment of women as exhibited in fictional art. Of sentimentalism he is the unceasing enemy. Mr. Meredith's heroines are women who would escape the feminine in themselves in order to assimilate something of masculine strength, who would be admitted within the pale of reasonable beings, and not left in the outer world of sentimentalities and gossip. And had Mr. Meredith accomplished nothing save the delineation of so noble and so new a type of heroine, had he accomplished nothing save to press home upon us the conviction that to the finer, the more spiritual, elements in woman-

hood we had hitherto done scant justice, that its beauty and its charm were resident in qualities other than those conventionally ascribed to it, his work would not be unfruitful. Mr. Meredith's success in penetrating into the very heart of the feminine character, the depth and subtlety of his analysis, the variety of the types he has presented —this is one of the pillars upon which his reputation rests.

Indisputably, I believe the perfection of these portraits of women consists in the art which the author shares with all the great writers who have excelled in the portraiture of women, the art with which he contrives, despite his searching analysis, to leave something untold, something of mystery in the character of every woman he has drawn. Mr. Meredith's instinct often fails him; it has never failed him here. He has recognised that however boldly the artist may delineate the character of a man, however completely render him, it is not possible to give the same finishing touches, the same air of finality to the character of a woman. Something that eludes analysis, something that declines to be rendered, remains, and to convey this impression is essential to avoid a mechanical result, a mere photograph. But Mr. Meredith, whatever his failings as an artist, is no mere photographer, and I, at least, am satisfied that his gallery of life-

like women is unmatched in any other English prose writer. Not only is he a master of the secrets of the female heart; no other novelist has such an eye for the graces of her person. Take this of Renée in *Beauchamp's Career*, Renée,

'a brunette of the fine lineaments of the good blood of France. . . . She chattered snatches of Venetian caught from the gondoliers, she was like a delicate cup of crystal brimming with the beauty of the place, and making one drink in all his impressions through her. Her features had the soft irregularities which ran to rarities of beauty, as the ripple rocks the light; mouth, eyes, brows, nostrils, and bloomy cheeks played into one another liquidly; thought flew, tongue followed, and the flash of meaning quivered over them like night-lightning.'

Or take this of Clara Middleton:—

'really insufferably fair, . . . a sight to set the woodland dancing. . . . She wore a dress cunning to embrace the shape and flutter loose about it, in the spirit of a Summer's day. Calypso-clad, Dr. Middleton would have called her. See the silver birch in the breeze: here it swells, there it scatters, and it is puffed to a round and it streams like a pennon, and now gives the glimpse and shine of the white stem's line within, now hurries over it, denying that it was visible, with a chatter along the sweeping folds, while still the white peeps through. She had the wonderful art of dressing to suit the season and the sky. To-day the art was ravishingly companionable with her sweet-lighted

face: too sweet, too vividly-meaningful for pretty, if not of the strict severity for beautiful. Millinery would tell us that she wore a fichu of thin white muslin crossed in front on a dress of the same light stuff, trimmed with deep rose. She carried a grey silk parasol, traced at the borders with green creepers, and across the arm devoted to Crossjay, a length of trailing ivy, and in that hand a bunch of the first long grasses. These hues of red rose and green and pale green, ruffled and pouted in the billowy white of the dress ballooning and valleying softly, like a yacht before the sail bends low; but she walked not like one blown against; resembling rather the day of the South-west driving the clouds, gallantly firm in commotion; interfusing colour and varying in her features from laugh to smile and look of settled pleasure, like the heavens above the breeze.'

What a picture for blended colour and movement! When one reads a passage like this, a picture from Mr. Meredith at his best, or when one comes upon a triumphant phrase like that descriptive of Vernon Whitford—'Phœbus Apollo turned fasting friar,' one cannot but acknowledge him, to borrow his own phrase of Alvan, as 'a figure of easy and superb predominance' among contemporary novelists. Yet when victory is within his grasp he misses it, for Mr. Meredith, though a great, is not a sure artist, comparable with Wordsworth in the sphere of poetry, capable of achieving great effects, but apparently unable to distinguish the great

effects and the writing which achieves no effect at all, or even a disagreeable one. The absence of the critical faculty, the blindness when one's own work is in question, though a serious defect in a poet is immeasurably more serious in a prose writer. Wordsworth was subject to 'strange hallucinations of the ear,' he frequently produced prose, and betrayed no consciousness that it was not high poetry. Hence it comes that with Wordsworth the part is greater than the whole. But that part is easily separable from the whole; a broad line may be drawn dividing the work of great and enduring value from the work of no value at all. Nor does the uninspired verse seriously interfere with our enjoyment of the inspired. But with a prose writer we are in no such happy case. Certainly with a prose writer like Mr. Meredith we are in very evil case indeed. We may easily separate the poet's wheat from the chaff, but no such separation can be made with the novelist. He is even less amenable than the historian to any principles of selection. He must be accepted or rejected as a whole, and can make no bid for popular favour in a volume of elegant extracts. Here are a number of bulky volumes within whose covers a full and systematised philosophy might easily find a home, within whose covers, indeed, a view of human life so clear, so sane, so complete as rightly to be

named philosophical is actually set forth; but if the view be clear and sane and complete, the exposition of the view is tortuous, beset with incoherencies and choked with perversities of diction. 'Inordinate unvaried length, sheer longinquity, staggers the head, ages the very heart of us at a view.' To make one's way to Mr. Meredith's elevated tableland of thought one must be a mountaineer, to whom neither *col* nor *arête* present any difficulties. There is no means of getting there save by toiling up the lower snow-slopes, and cutting a path with the ice-axe for the remainder of the journey. It might almost be said of some of Mr. Meredith's novels that they were not designed by their author to be read any more than the Himalayas were designed by Nature to be climbed. Doubtless many of the eccentricities of his style are incidental to his genius and temperament, but we are convinced that its worst faults are faults which its possessor has acquired, not succeeded to as part of his original mental equipment.

Mr. Meredith, then, has taught himself to write the style that is characteristic of him, and he has done so in order to avoid 'the malady of sameness, our modern malady,' as he calls it. On every page of his writing appears his horror of the commonplace. Language worn dull by use, phrases that have lost their edge, collocations of words with

which the ear is familiar, these he will have none of. There is no one who will not sympathise with an author acutely sensitive to the value of words, acutely sensitive to the diminution of their power or picturesqueness in certain combinations. But we are too willing to accept piquancy or novelty as distinction in style, just as we are often too willing to accept eccentricity as genius. And not infrequently Mr. Meredith, in his determination to be anything rather than commonplace in diction, has succeeded only too well by becoming unintelligible or aggressively obscure. 'He succeeds,' says Mr. Barrie somewhere of his phrases, 'he succeeds, I believe, as often as he fails.' There is an heroic ring in this daring 'I believe.' Grant the contention, and we are merely reiterating that he is not a sure artist. Mr. Meredith, as is often remarked, is too consistently clever, and mere cleverness palls. A writer, to deserve the epithet great, should be master of a various power, a various charm; he should subdue us by sympathy, by enthusiasm, by wit, by reason, by an appeal to the heart as well as by an appeal to the head; Mr. Meredith hammers too exclusively at our intelligence. 'The creative power and the intellectual energy,' says Coleridge of Shakespeare, 'wrestle as in a war embrace.' Something of the same kind is true of Mr. Meredith, but his intellectual power generally obtains the mastery. And

it is here that his admirers who desire to preserve their allegiance to the traditions of classic art become his critics. His first conceptions, his initial designs, are projected on a superb scale, his instinct probes to the centre. Then comes the hour of elaboration, of patient and gradual progression; and the temptation to make dashing excursions, forays of intellectual brilliance, into adjoining country proves too much for him. The plan of the attack is that of a heaven-born commander, but the management of the campaign is slow and desultory. In a word, Mr. Meredith's judgment is not equal to his genius. What a spendthrift he is of his intellectual wealth, how wantonly he sows with the whole sack, his readers do not need to be informed. We are indeed willing to acknowledge that there is a princeliness, something of the intellectual potentate, about this splendid diffusion of treasure, this unlimited largess from inexhaustible mines of mind. There is no need for Mr. Meredith to hoard his thoughts, or to tender each for acceptance with impressive accompanying ceremonies, to offer his jewels only when cut and polished and set in a frame of precious metal choicely wrought as a foil. Are such methods only appropriate in the case of scanty possessions? Here you may choose and bear away what you will from these indistinguished heaps where the commonest

pebbles are strewn side by side with gems worthy the lapidary's art.

Yet since it is not Mr. Meredith's intellectual wealth but the perfection of his art that is in question, there is no other verdict possible than that already given—his judgment is not equal to his genius. How vastly would readers profit had the entire garden been weeded even as *Richard Feverel* has been weeded. In the second edition of that book whole paragraphs, even chapters of irrelevancy disappeared, and in the edition now offered to the public further excisions, including the chapter entitled 'A Shadowy View of Cœlebs Pater going about with a Glass Slipper,' have been made. It is a hopeful sign. The surplusage in this final edition of Mr. Meredith's works is not indeed wholly removed; it is not in the nature of things wholly removable. Much of it is so imbedded in the fabric itself that to remove it would be to dislocate and loosen the entire framework. Apart, too, from the mere surplusage, removable or irremovable, there are the extravagances of diction which disfigure so many even of the finest passages. In his determination to avoid the insipidity of the commonplace, Mr. Meredith was driven into permitting himself a freedom of speech which deserted elegance to ally itself with licence, and failed to justify the union in the only way in which the union can be justified,

by success. Great writers commonly attain their effects with apparent ease; to suggest strain argues littleness. Yet of all English writers of rank there is perhaps not one who seems to write with more continued effort, as of a gymnast performing feats whose only interest lies in their difficulty, feats which we would willingly believe not merely difficult, but impossible. In the efforts, belated efforts one must call them, to prune away useless excrescences upon his work, Mr. Meredith virtually acknowledges the recklessness of his methods. In describing, too, Diana's novel *The Cantatrice*, it is, we think, with a side-glance at his own works.

'No clever transcript of the dialogue of the day occurred,' we are told; 'no hair-breadth 'scapes, perils by sea and land, heroisms of the hero, fine shrieks of the heroine; no set scenes of catching pathos and humour; no distinguishable points of social satire, equivalent to a smacking of the public on the chaps, which excites it to a grin with keen discernment of the author's intention. She did not appeal to the senses nor to a superficial discernment. So she had the anticipatory sense of failure; and *she wrote her best in perverseness.*'

Mr. Meredith, too, I think, has written his best, but in perverseness. Not because he has avoided, as Diana is here described as having avoided, the commonplace situations, characters,

and methods of the average novelist, has he failed to reach a wider audience. The author and his admirers indeed bear themselves as if it were so, but they are seriously at fault. Not because he has been original do we make a quarrel with so remarkable an author—Mr. Meredith's argument is not too high, nor his wit too subtle for us,—but because, it is a simple reason, he has been neglectful of important artistic principles derived from the capitalised experience of writers and readers. The audience is not all to blame. Others beside the sluggish in intellect dislike his mannerisms — many eager readers, many who find in him the most potent, the most invigorating spirit among modern prose writers.

But Mr. Meredith does not offend in his style alone; he transgresses the limits of ease and clearness, he transgresses the limits of warrantable analysis. Little enough is often gleaned from the torture to which he so indefatigably subjects his characters. They yield less than one expects when examined on the rack of his method. The determined probing to the bitter end, the following up of every thread of motive, every hereditary phase of character, every temperamental idiosyncrasy to its source is not of necessity either entertaining or instructive, and Mr. Meredith often fails to justify it. The fixed introspective eye becomes dim and

loses its sense of proportion, and the results of its scrutiny are often disappointing. Mr. Meredith shows us the human heart, but we are not convinced that his knowledge, as he would seemingly have us believe, has really been derived from a study of it under the microscope. He knows it instinctively, but displays it otherwise than he has actually learned it. He has acquired his knowledge in one way, he is for having us acquire it in another. It may also indeed justly be remarked that it is with the results of analysis rather than with its processes that art is primarily concerned; our interest centres in the results. In Mr. Meredith's novels the processes are sometimes unnecessarily exposed, and we are asked to admire their ingenuity rather than to contemplate their final expression. There is, when one thinks of it, hardly one of his brilliant intellectual powers which is not abused. Take his wit. The creator of Diana, of Adrian, the wise youth, of Col. de Craye, of Dr. Corney, of many another of his witty personages, had a plentiful need of wit, and there are chapters in *Feverel* alone which may stand beside the work of any English humorist. Mr. Meredith's witty personages too really sparkle; we are not told that their conversation is brilliant, we are present, and hear it for ourselves. Yet how often does it happen that his wit, like his analysis, is not helpful. The temptation to make even the

average man witty is in itself sufficient to betray him, and we exclaim, 'Oh that he should put cunning words into their mouths to steal away their individualities!' Was there ever author so ready to sacrifice his main design to subsidiary decoration, to exhibit his intellectual versatility at the expense of his art? To me it seems that every book he has written is a dissertation on the superiority of his genius to his judgment. It is writ large over all his greater as well as his lesser works. The great outstanding things in literature are the designs of the masters. Not their language, not their sentiments, not their thoughts, but the firm outline of their towering design, the disposed and ordered whole, conspicuous, proudly pre-eminent. To appeal once more to ancient art, that is where the Greeks excelled. They saw to it that, as Matthew Arnold wrote, 'the action itself, the situation of Orestes, or Merope, or Alcmæon, was to stand the central point of interest, unforgotten, absorbing, principal; that no accessories were for a moment to distract the spectator's attention from this; that the tone of the parts was to be continually kept down, in order not to impair the grandiose effect of the whole.' As has been already observed, Mr. Meredith sets himself a task infinitely more difficult than that undertaken by the Greek dramatist. His stage is always crowded: in *Vittoria*, for example,

the story of the Italian rising of 1848 till the battle of Novara, we have a bewildering number of *dramatis personæ*, Austrians, Italians, Englishmen, with their entrances and exits; it is a turmoil of events, intrigues, passions, fanaticisms. But because he has set himself a task of almost unexampled severity, because his stage is so crowded, the interests so numerous and varied, for this reason we are the more in need of a resolute adherence to the main design, for this reason 'not a word should be wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in.' The larger the original conception, the more rigorous the exclusion demanded by the best traditions of art of all that is not strictly to the purpose, that does not further the argument nor advance the movement of the piece. If in the Greek drama, despite its restricted sphere, the parts were so strictly subordinated to the whole, if the poet found it necessary to keep himself in hand, unless we embrace ideas that differ *toto cœlo* from those of ancient art, it is tenfold more necessary in the case of the modern artist who ranges freely over the whole domain of human life. But so busied is Mr. Meredith with his accessories, that to the action in his novels, surely an important part of the design, he is frequently indifferent, and it becomes occasionally a problem of some difficulty to ascertain what is actually going on. Yet with action the most intellectual

of us are and must remain more in sympathy than with ideas, however subtly distilled.

Unhappily for fictional art the novelist has never had to please the critic; he has not been educated in the school of the severest discipline and best traditions. It has ever been sufficient if he found in himself a power to tickle the public taste irrespective of artistic conventions and artistic ideals. Yet it can hardly be considered idle to inquire for the qualities which have enabled some works to endure the unrelaxing test of time through centuries, and to suggest that similar qualities may be counted upon to ensure a similar result in the future. Not all works of genius survive, though his genius obtains present indulgence for Mr. Meredith. Much may be pardoned to genius, even though displayed in a spasmodic fashion, when there is never any doubt that it is there. The knowledge that it is there draws us like a magnet; we read on patiently, and now and then we are rewarded for our constancy. Only his genius too enables him to triumph in any measure over the difficulties with which he has strewn his own path to success. And as it is he must suffer. Either the writer or the reader must take the pains, and readers are conspicuously an indolent race.

We are not inclined to think that criticism is much concerned with the fact that the plots of

several of Mr. Meredith's novels follow history very closely, and that some of his *dramatis personæ* enjoyed an actual flesh-and-blood existence before they entered the shadow-world of a life in fiction. The Elizabethan drama did not exclude actions or characters within the memory of living men, and fiction has always claimed the privilege of an appeal to the interests of the hour. *Vittoria*, as has been noticed, reproduces the main incidents of the Italian insurrection of 1848; in *Beauchamp's Career* something of the political and social life of England at the time of the Crimean War is reproduced; in *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* the author has followed a part of the career of the famous Earl of Peterborough, who made his reputation as a soldier of genius at Valencia, but, found of too imperious a temper, was recalled in 1707, and in 1722 privately married a famous singer, Anastasia Robinson, who was not, however, acknowledged as Countess until shortly before the death of the Earl. In *The Tragic Comedians* Mr. Meredith is indebted for something more than the mere framework of his plot. It is, as the author entitles it, 'a study in a well-known story'—the story of the loves of Ferdinand Lassalle, the German Social Democrat, and Helene von Döninges, afterwards Frau von Racowitza. Mr. Meredith not only follows the incidents which, in real life as in the novel, lead to the

tragic death of Lassalle, but is indebted for the greater part of his dialogue to an account published by Frau von Racowitza of the episode of her life, entitled *Meine Beziehungen zu Ferdinand Lassalle.* More public interest has been excited, however, in Mr. Meredith's reproduction, in *Diana of the Crossways*, of the life and career of Caroline Norton, one of the three beautiful granddaughters of Sheridan, and sister of Lady Dufferin, mother of the present Marquis of Dufferin and Ava. Caroline Norton's marriage proved a most unhappy one, and her friendship with Lord Melbourne, then Prime Minister, led to an unsuccessful action for divorce brought against her by her husband. Famous not only in society for her beauty and her wit, Mrs. Norton was distinguished as one of the most popular poets and novelists of her time. Her writings were characterised by their enthusiastic advocacy of what we might now denominate the rights of women. The incident upon which the plot of Mr. Meredith's novel hinges was the story (unauthentic) of Mrs. Norton's betrayal to Barnes, the editor of *The Times*, of the communication made to her in strict secrecy by one of her most ardent admirers, Sidney Herbert, to the effect that Sir Robert Peel and his Cabinet had resolved upon a repeal of the Corn Laws. Whether Mr. Meredith has been successful in reconciling his readers to

such a gross breach of confidence on the part of his heroine it would be difficult to determine; that his explanation of her conduct is inadequate, one must admit. It is the one defect in an otherwise charming portrait, but possibly the author felt himself justified in securing in this fashion for an otherwise blameless lady that touch of pity which tends to deepen our sympathy with a brilliant and fascinating, but perhaps not in all respects a winning or attractive, character. I would place *Diana of the Crossways* second to *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, incontestably Mr. Meredith's most perfect work from the standpoint of art, as least open, in spite of its obscurities, to the charges of sluggish development and the introduction of irrelevant intellectual excursions. What Mr. Meredith has to say in his own person in this book seems to harmonise more completely with its subject. *Feverel*, were it not for its ending, so admirably commented upon by the late Robert Louis Stevenson, is indeed almost faultless.

But if *Richard Feverel*, taken all in all, be Mr. Meredith's greatest work, *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* is his supreme achievement in the higher comedy. His portrait of Richmond Roy is surely the most impressive, the most masterful, in his whole gallery. A character so near the verge of utter improbability and yet convincing, so near the verge of

scoundrelism and yet attractive, so near the verge of the absurd, yet so pathetic. When we think of Richmond Roy we are no longer critical of Mr. Meredith's defects. This romantic voyager in dreamland, this master of the springs of emotion, this sublime architect in cloudland, this schemer hardly less noble than the noble, lacking only some trifling ingredient to become altogether heroic, a later Falstaff, whose heart too is at last broken, this portrait is Mr. Meredith's outstanding triumph among many triumphs. The contrast, too, between Squire Beltham, the vindictive old man who stands for respectability and all the best that respectability has to show, with the brilliant free lance of the outer unconventional world, Richmond Roy himself — the contrast between these two antagonistic types, and the battle between them for the son of the one and the grandson of the other, are grandly conceived. These two tower over against each other like Homeric combatants, and their challenges and defiances are, like their contest, Homeric. If *Feverel* be Mr. Meredith's most perfect work, this is of all his books the one which commands the fullest admiration of his genius, which evinces his possession of the highest type of power. In *The Egoist* many of Mr. Meredith's admirers find proof of a greater achievement; but Sir Willoughby Patterne, though evolved with

astonishing skill, is a far less complex character, a commoner, a coarser, and a more easily rendered type, without the finer strands of poetry and romance which are woven through the heart and brain of Richmond Roy. And I am not sure that in his delineation Mr. Meredith does not betray that uncertainty of judgment which mars so much of his finest work. His main appeal is, as elsewhere, mainly to our intelligence; but the appeal is here so exclusively to our intelligence, he harps so remorselessly, vindictively we might say, upon the single string, he insists so strongly upon the line of his effect that, having been early convinced, we become in the end, and indeed long before the end, entirely wearied. Sir Willoughby Patterne is an Egoist, and the ingenious methods by which he is driven to a self-revelation are in the earlier part of the book quite to our taste. We are in close sympathy with the invisible wicked imps in attendance, they 'who love to uncover ridiculousness in imposing figures,' they who, 'whenever they catch sight of Egoism, pitch their camp, circle and squat, and forthwith trim their lanterns confident of the ludicrous to come.' But Mr. Meredith is not content to reveal the Egoist to a private audience of imps and readers, he must be revealed to us *ad nauseam*; and not to us only, but to his *fiancée*, to his relations, at

length to an outer circle of friends and worshippers, and hardly stops short of a revelation to the whole country-side, fascinated and agape. We can believe in the Sir Willoughby of the earlier part of the story, but as the 'comedy in narrative' progresses, the Egoist wounded, pierced by a shaft here and there, loses the jaunty self-possession of the knight encased in armour of proof, and begins to stumble to and fro with uncertain steps. Then the hunt fairly sets in, and Mr. Meredith, not content with his revelation, cries 'Havoc,' and lets loose the hounds of merciless laughter, who drive the Egoist before them, a spent and quivering and degraded thing. He will not permit a pause in the chase until the self-possessed English gentleman has proclaimed himself ass and churl in trumpet tones. Revelation of his character is not sufficient; the Egoist must be whipped in public, and soundly, too. And the portrait, at first that of the true Egoist, a man of the world, presents at length the coarse and repellent features of the coward and the loon. Surely here the author has over-analysed until his instinct left him and his discernment played him false. Nothing is easier than to sacrifice the truth of a representation by over-elaboration, and here, in the eagerness to display the Nemesis which dogs the steps of the Egoist, the limits are passed which divide the por-

trait from the caricature. A degree overmuch of emphasis, of vehemence in the presentation, mars in our judgment the chief portrait in a great book.

'The hardest and surest proof of a great and absolute genius,' says Mr. Swinburne, 'is the gift of a power to make us feel in every nerve that thus and not otherwise, but in all things even as we are told and shown, it was and it must have been with the human figures set before us in their action and their suffering, that thus and not otherwise they absolutely must and would have felt and thought and spoken under the proposed conditions.'

On the application of this test to *The Egoist*, or indeed to any of Mr. Meredith's novels, one finds that the inevitable is at times replaced in his narrative by the unexpected or the unintelligible. The degree overmuch of vehemence is not in *The Egoist* only a hostile element to the effect of his art; it is characteristic of him that the shorter time he is about it the more perfect are his results—he begins better than he leaves off. Truth of outline, truth of tone, but not truth of detail, belong to his characterisation. Mr. Meredith misses then the point in art which suppresses the irrelevant or the accidental, and, dependent as it is upon his judgment, his humour of phrase is not always successful, his wit not

always wise. The ingenious arabesque of thought is frequently not justified by subordination to a purpose; the coruscation of fanciful imagery lends no elucidating light. But how different is it with his humour of view, the humour that belongs to his mental attitude, his outlook over life, the humour that is of the essence of his genius. See it at work in the creation of a character, even of secondary importance, like Colonel de Craye, or Mrs. Berry, or Lord Romney, 'a gentleman whose character it was to foresee most human events.' See it in the lambent irony which pervades and leavens his books. What an extraordinary breadth of humorous appreciation of life is his!—now he calls for jeering Aristophanic laughter, now it is the humour of pathetic situations, now of the great and now of the little incongruities of life that move him. It is in the breadth of his humour and in the breadth of his characterisation that Mr. Meredith's greatness consists; in his intellectual penetration and his imaginative range. His method involves revelation of character by analysis, but analysis conducted while his personages pass through the fire of some crucial position, or are subjected to the shock of circumstance, as of Beauchamp tested amid the conflict of party politics, or Emilia drawn at once by love of country and passion for her lover.

And that the only fatality is the fatality of character is a truth driven home in all Mr. Meredith's greater novels. Thus is his tragedy human, and thus it comes that it is not depressing. Human life is never represented in his novels as tragic, because an iron necessity drives man whither he would not go; but tragic only when a free choice is unwisely made, or when passion guides, or when the stress of storm finds the spirit too weak or unresourceful to meet and endure it. In all the greater novels, too, which may be said to end with *The Egoist*, Mr. Meredith's style, when at its best, has the elasticity of steel with its strength. Like a 'sword of Spain, the ice-brook's temper,' it can, within the moment, bend like a bow and spring again to the bright, quivering, darting line that bears the inexsuperable point. And with all its faults, it is a robust organic style that suits its subject. One might trace in it many influences, and that in spite of its distinctive peculiarities. In a sentence such as this, 'Their common candle wore with dignity the brigand's hat of midnight, and cocked a drunken eye at them from under it,' one seems to hear the voice of Dickens; in *Rhoda Fleming* there are passages which George Eliot might have written; the hand of Thackeray might have assisted in the creation of Jack Raikes in *Evan*

Harrington; Carlyle's Teutonic style in full blast is displayed in *Farina.* Yet in its strength and weakness it is wholly its creator's; on this page magnificent and unsurpassable, on the next intolerable and unreadable. The ordinary man, it has been said, is satisfied to see something going on, the man of more intelligence must be made to feel, the man of high cultivation must be made to reflect. To the society of the highly cultivated Mr. Meredith makes his appeal, and not without response. But had his judgment equalled his genius, he would, I believe, have appealed to them past all resistance, as no English novelist has yet appealed to them, in an appeal that would have been irresistible for all time.

THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL[1]

THE terms *classic* and *romantic*, freely bandied about in the literary criticism of the last hundred years, can hardly be said to have attained any definite connotation, any sharp precision of meaning. The classic authors, *par excellence*, are the ancients, the makers of the literatures of Greece or Rome; and the classics of our own or any other literature are the writers who best represent it, who have given to it whatever of beauty or of dignity it may possess. Thus far we speak the language of the market-place, and are intelligible to the average citizen; but if we adopt the phrases of the schools, if we speak of the classics of our own literature as romantic in temper; of some of the ancients, like Virgil, as no less so; if we speak of classic subjects as treated by Marlowe or Shelley in the romantic manner, or of romantic subjects by Keats and Byron in the classic couplet, we introduce conceptions to the comprehension of which a course of literary history is the only avenue.

[1] *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, by W. L. Phelps.

It is, indeed, neither possible nor desirable to harden into absolute definition the general sense suggested by these terms, but because, however loosely they may be applied, they represent certain real characteristics, represent each a clearly marked group or blend of qualities, we are called upon to retain them, and to render to ourselves some account of them. The term *classic* needs no interpretation as regards origin—that which belongs to the first class—but a serviceable suggestion may be gleaned from the origin of the term *romantic*. When the northern barbarians streamed through the various gates of the declining Roman empire, and, victorious, imposed their rule upon the conquered Romans, they rendered a homage to the power that once had ruled the world by acknowledging the language of the conquered inhabitants as the language which best represented the results of civilisation, as the language proper to the church, the school, and the law, the *lingua Latina*. But beside the purer language of the scholar, they found flourishing a language of the people, *lingua Romana rustica*, and with this the language of the conquering tribes was eventually mingled. The mother Latin thus became the parent of several daughters, the Romance languages. By *Romance* of course we mean no longer a language, but a type of composition, of which the poems and tales

of the troubadours were the earliest specimens; and as the new conditions of life gave birth to a literature which differed not merely in form, but in spirit and tone from the older literature, we come into possession of a term which is descriptive of that spirit and tone. Thus from the moment at which Renaissance influences are first apparent in our own literature, the need arises to distinguish by the terms *classic* and *romantic* the two clearly defined tendencies in art, the two clearly marked lines of artistic purpose discernible in the work of English writers. It may be said of Chaucer that he was at school in France and at the university in Italy; his early poetical education was obtained in the school of the Romance writers, his later in the school of the Classical Revival. But the impulse generated by the Renaissance in the direction of a study and imitation of the classic literatures, though it assisted in the technical education of the English poets of the age of Elizabeth, did not, as in France, exert an immediate and overpowering influence upon our literature. In the Elizabethan drama, as represented by Marlowe and by Shakespeare, the romantic temper predominates, the romantic spirit is triumphant.—

'Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!'

'I dreamt there was an emperor Antony;—
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man! . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, . . . in his livery
Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket.'

Such passages vibrate to the true romantic string, but while the spirit of romance predominates in Elizabethan literature, while the romantic note rings clear above all others in it, a tendency may be read there, which was destined to outlast the romantic, was destined to a later, but no less complete a triumph. While Marlowe, and Spenser, and Shakespeare pursued the path along which they were guided by their own genius and the stronger impulses of the time, Ben Jonson, who was student and scholar no less than poet, pondering over the precedents and principles of art as exhibited in the works of ancient literature, endeavoured to frame for himself an *apparatus criticus* of precept and example, and as early as Spenser's university days a group of scholars and critics were ready to agree with Ascham that 'our rude beggarly rhyming was first brought into Italy by Goths and Huns, when all good verses and all good learning were destroyed by them.'

In France the Renaissance ideals achieved an

immediate triumph, and from the foundation of the Academy in 1635, those ideals were enthroned in absolute authority, and the reign of the classical tradition assured. The English authors of the Elizabethan period remained for the most part untrammelled by the classic tradition, about which they knew or cared little, and Jonson and Milton, who may be regarded as in one sense the last of the Elizabethans, were the first great English writers who followed by deliberate choice the traditions of classical rather than of English literature. Thus gradually was it, and not until the appeal made upon the imagination by the widening horizons of the physical and intellectual worlds began to prove less potent and stimulating, that the influence of the new learning makes itself fully felt, and the studies of the scholars shape the ideals of the republic of letters. What, then, were the qualities which the Renaissance found so admirable in the works of the ancients, what potent charm resided in those qualities strong enough to create an enthusiasm for the classic literatures which, ripened later into something like a superstitious regard for them as divinely perfect, as literatures beside which those of the Romance languages were merely barbarous or Gothic?

All art springs from the instinctive human worship of the ideal, of perfection: art celebrates

beauty, and ministers to the human desire for it. But to some races, as to some individuals, certain aspects of beauty make the most persuasive appeal, and to others certain other aspects. For one man the highest note in poetry is struck by such a passage as this from Wordsworth :—

'The Form remains, the Function never dies ;
While we the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish :—be it so !
Enough if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour :
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.'

For another, the cup of intellectual delight brims over when magic accents such as these from Coleridge fall upon his ear :—

'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea.'

To the Greeks, the beauty which resides in form, in perfect proportions, made the most powerful appeal ; hence in their sculpture, and in their architecture, the Greeks became the masters of the world. The classic spirit in art, too, is for ever

associated with sharpness of intellectual outline, precision of design, with purity, and calm, and order. 'What is there lovely in poetry,' says Landor, 'unless there be moderation and composure?' The qualities which the Renaissance found admirable in ancient art were those which distinguished it from the romantic, the qualities of simplicity, repose, precision, order. These it found admirable because the mediæval world knew beauty under other and differing guises, and the noble simplicities of ancient art once known asserted a sovereign power. The aim of the classic artist—one may read it on every surviving work, on every magnificent fragment—was to elevate rather than to affect; the aim of the romantic artist to affect, and again affect, and once again affect. Thus classic art is dominated by the conception that only what is fully grasped, completely realised and understood, is suitable for artistic treatment; mediæval art is eager to suggest a significance, a depth of meaning, such as may, with however vague imaginings, dilate the soul.

Christian revelation, with its introduction of truths beyond precise comprehension, carried the artist of the middle ages into dealing with human life as an island in an ocean of mystery, but an ocean across which the light of heaven shone, across which the saints of God continually were

privileged to journey. While, then, the classic spirit in art is associated with form, and calm, and order, the mediæval is suffused with colour, enthusiasm, and mystery; for the one believed in the senses and fed them with beauty, keeping as its ideal, 'self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,' the other discredited the earthly senses, and had for its ideal self-abandonment, a knowledge of God, and spiritual raptures. Approaching truth by analysis, Greek art draws in outline and speaks a direct language; approaching truth by intuition and faith, Christian art paints in colour and speaks in symbol. The Greek, like Sophocles, believed in the real world with all its certainties. He saw all that he did see with unfailing clearness of vision, and the spirit of precision and simplicity bear rule in the sphere of his artistic creation.[1] The Christian of the middle ages, like Dante, believed in an invisible world, with all its terrors and splendours seen only by the eye of the soul; and enthusiasm, inspired fervour, emotional glow, and a sense of reverence and of awe are the marks of his art.

In their reproduction of life in art the ancients, then, aimed at clearness and sharpness of outline, both in idea and language, and were thus content to win acceptance, not so much through

[1] I have here and elsewhere in this paper made use of one or two sentences of my own previously published.

the excitement resident in the subject as through their treatment of it. 'The charm of what is classical in art or literature,' wrote Mr. Pater, 'is that of the well-known tale, to which we can nevertheless listen over and over again, because it is told so well. . . . It is the addition of strangeness to beauty that constitutes the romantic character in art. . . . It is the addition of curiosity to the desire for beauty that constitutes the romantic temper.' 'The essence of romance is mystery,' says another critic; 'it is the sense of something hidden, of imperfect revelation.' The romantic artist, not content with the sharp, clear outline of the classical artist, desires to suggest, to arouse the feeling of expectation or of awe, of something yet untold. 'Clear, unimpassioned presentation of the subject, whether done in prose or verse, is the prominent feature of the classical style.' We may speak of the classical artist as disinterested: he stands aloof from his creations, they betray no trace of his personal affections, dislikes, enthusiasms. 'Homer,' says Landor, 'is subject to none of the passions, but he sends them all forth on their errands with as much precision as Apollo his golden arrows.'

While, then, ancient or classic art takes the world as it finds it, and imports into it no personal element, and few moral and intellectual problems,

the romantic artist declines to accept the present and visible as the only sphere for art; and seeking in his own mind for sentiments and ideas, presents a new world, composed of the world as it appears to sense together with another, the world as it *might* be, or *will* be, or *ought* to be, or perhaps, if all were known, really *is*, a world drawn from his ideals, and feelings, and desires. Romanticism rejoices in the freshness and the glory of the exhaustless vistas and changing emotional and spiritual perspectives of the world; classicism in the sharply defined presentations of the intellect, the victory of reason over emotion as well as over the baffling problems of the soul. 'All art,' said Mr. Pater, 'constantly aspires towards the conditions of music'; and again it has been contended that the very perfection of lyrical poetry, which is artistically the highest and most complete form of poetry, seems to depend on 'a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject.' These are *dicta* from the notebook of the romantic critic. He speaks of *mere subject*; with him the perfection of poetry is reached when meaning is almost lost in an excess of sensuous suggestiveness. He desires to affect. With Aristotle the lyric was not the highest and most complete form of poetry, and architectonics, constructive power, design, ranked far above the mere accessories of music and diction. He desires to

elevate. If bred in the classical school, the critic's first requirement in poetry is that it should be articulate, else how can it serve the reason? Mr. Matthew Arnold's preference was consequently enlisted on the side of the poetry which made for intellectual clearness and moral force, for the poetry which touched life at the greatest number of points of human interest, and illuminated or interpreted it. The most artistic poetry for Mr. Arnold was poetry such as this:—

'If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath with pain
To tell my story.'

With Mr. Pater it would have been poetry such as this, which weaves a fantasy around the song of the nightingale:—

'The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.'

When one is asked to make choice between passages such as these, exhibiting poetry at its best in different moods, one is reminded of the children's game in which the delicate question is secretly

proposed to each player in turn, 'Would you rather have a golden apple or a golden pear?' and the answer enlists him in one or other of two opposing camps. Some of us insist on the qualities of the golden apple, on truth and high seriousness, on intellectual and moral insight in poetry; some on the qualities of the golden pear, on sensuous and emotion-stirring powers, on perfume and bouquet, on music and mystery. There exists no need at this time to rank the apple before the pear, or to disparage its qualities beside those of its more luscious companion. But we must note that from the moment at which the fountains of the Elizabethan inspiration began to fail, and writers with a student's enthusiasm to seek for principles to guide their efforts, the qualities of ancient poetry attracted a continually deepening and widening appreciation. Yet because the genius of Greek literature declined to yield up the secret of its subtle perfections to an age in which scholarship was young,[1] the English writers of the Augustan age failed to reproduce anything of the Greek spirit in their work, and were successful only in reproducing something of the spirit of Latin literature, a

[1] Bentley's comment upon Pope's *Homer*—'A very pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer'—may perhaps stand as the first record in English of a true appreciation of the distinctive genius of Greek poetry.

literature imitative and disciplined, majestic but measured, regular, orderly, formal, sober in subject and manner. Propriety of language, correctness and precision, restraint and moderation, these words express the lessons learned from the Roman authors by Dryden and his successors. And in the sphere of prose the lessons were of inestimable value. The gain to English poetry is not so obvious. However willing we may be to retain for the school of Pope and Johnson the title of the classical school of English poetry, it is evident that the writers who belonged to it neither appreciated profoundly the true character of Hellenic and Roman art, nor did they succeed in imitating it with the closeness desired. Dryden and Pope and Johnson exhibit the qualities of simplicity, repose, precision, and these have been named as classic qualities. But they attain them by limiting the scope of their undertakings. They are simple because they deal only with the familiar facts of life; calm, because they have never known what it is to be profoundly moved; precise, because they merely repeat in terser phrase the current opinions of the time. Simplicity, repose, precision are only admirable and precious, are only *classic*, when threatened by imaginative wealth, emotional fervour, intellectual profundity. But the poets of the Augustan age were in perfect security from these

splendid dangers. Pope, as Johnson said, 'wrote in such a manner as might expose him to few hazards.' The times, indeed, were not in need of poetry; prose satisfied the pressing intellectual needs of the majority. How little was the necessity felt for poetry at all is seen in the words of Pope: 'I chose verse because I could express ideas more shortly than in prose itself.' Pope chose verse not because he felt the need of verse, but because he found it a superior kind of prose. It might not be too much to say that with the majority at any period prose answers every need of their natures. But with the middle of the eighteenth century came a demand for something more than a superior prose, and we may think accurately of the Romantic Revival as a reaction in favour of poetry as against prose. The qualities which the writers of the Augustan age lacked, even in their poetry, were precisely the qualities which make poetry, which go to distinguish it from prose, and the Romantic Revival was the outcome of a need for a medium of fuller expression felt by the spiritual and emotional part of human nature, which had for a time suffered eclipse. The character of English literature in the eighteenth century may be summed up by saying that its appeal was an appeal almost exclusively to the intelligence; it looked upon man as if he were of intelligence all

compact, and was not ruled by feeling and instinct and authority and fancy in a greater degree than by the lucubrations of his reason. The Romantic Revival enthroned in the room of reason and of law, aspirations, desires, ideals—in a word, absolute though unattainable perfection in the place of relative perfection, represented by tolerable social and political institutions. With the Revolution at the end of the century came the idea of

> 'the ultimate angels' law,
> Indulging every instinct of the soul,
> There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing.'

It may be paradoxical to assert that the interests of the Augustan age were not literary or artistic, that they were political or religious; but the literature of the period is a series of practical and polemical pamphlets, prose and verse, into which are compressed the best ideas, the most cogent arguments connected with questions of the day. 'Subjects of importance to society' were the poet's themes, what interested 'the Town' his business. Hence is it that the age of Anne adored in literature the neat, the finished, the complete, in a word the finite, and the men of letters chose to treat in art only such subjects as lent themselves to a presentation in sharp, clear outlines, topics in which no mystery lurked, and upon which expressions of final opinion were possible. Thus was the sphere

of art cabin'd and confined, and no room could be found for lyric poetry in a generation whose interests were practical, and could not therefore be sung about.

It is not surprising that such an age should dislike obscurity and extravagance, enthusiasm or intemperate emotion, and should correspondingly admire clearness, precision, moderation, and common-sense; that it should ridicule the 'metaphysical' poets who had carried the Elizabethan characteristics to excess; that it should hold as barbarous and Gothic Spenser and Marlowe, and prefer Chaucer in a version by Dryden; that it should lack interest in nature, and find in the social life of the town the only pleasures worthy of the cultivated man.

It will not do to think of the Romantic Revival as a protest against classical qualities in poetry, or as arising out of a mere desire for the new and strange; it had its origin in a gradual recognition of the inadequate account virtually taken of human nature by the current mode of thought in the early eighteenth century. Even during the undisputed sovereignty of the Augustan tradition, an individual author here and there showed in his writings that he harboured treasonable ideas. A writer like Allan Ramsay not only harboured treasonable ideas, but indulged in treasonable practices. As Principal Shairp says, 'Ramsay had the courage, in

a conventional time both in English and Scottish poetry, to recognise and be true to the manners, the simple everyday life, the rural character, and the scenery of his native land.' Others, like Parnell and William Hamilton, the author of the *Braes of Yarrow*, might be cited as secret traitors, the pioneers of revolution. We can conceive the more imaginative minds of the time protesting that the world of moderation and good taste and common-sense was a somewhat dull world, in which there was little to interest and less to attract or charm; we can conceive the growth of an appetite for something more emotional in poetry or more stimulating in philosophy. The tide of opinion gradually rose until it became possible for heresy to appear in print unabashed, such heresy as Joseph Warton's, for example, who wrote in 1756: 'I revere the memory of Pope, I respect and honour his abilities, but I do not think him at the head of his profession. In other words, in that species of poetry wherein Pope excelled, he is superior to all mankind, and I only say that this species of poetry is not the most excellent one of the art.' That in the representative poetry of the time certain qualities essential to poetry were absent, that in the representative philosophy of the time only a small part of the actual truth about things was told, could only be convictions of gradual growth.

In the real world, in the world there could be no mistake about, the eighteenth century had a profound belief. But common-sense realism turns its back upon truth by declining to investigate it. And in effect we can imagine the early Romanticists asking the exasperating question, What is the real world? In the account given of the universe by some enthusiastic scientists a generation ago, the eighteenth-century point of view recurred, and when the metaphysician inquired innocently enough, What is the real world? he acted again the part unconsciously played in the domain of æsthetics by the revolutionaries. The world of eighteenth-century art and philosophy was the world so far as it was thoroughly understood. But the world as far as it is fully understood falls far short of the real world, said the Romanticists. The sphere of art is not the apparent world of reality: to art belongs the right and privilege of entrance into the larger reality, it emancipates man from the bondage of his little circumscribed life of conventions and customs and routine, and makes him a citizen of the universe. And so when Mr. Pater says, 'It is the addition of strangeness to beauty that constitutes the romantic character in art,' he is expressing only a half-truth, for a large part of the delight which the poetry of Romanticism can give arises out of a recognition that the poet has penetrated to a higher sphere of

reality than that in which we are accustomed to move, and we appreciate not the strangeness but the truth of his conception. Take the nature poetry of Wordsworth—take a poem like that entitled *The Education of Nature*:—

'Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.

.

She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."'

Is this a string of conceits, or is it a profound philosophy? If your feelings respond to verses

such as these, you are a true child of the Romantic Revival, or rather you are a human being with needs other than mere intellectual needs, a human being open to impressions from 'worlds unrealised,' and possessed of sympathies which admit you into the secret councils of the universal mind. But it cannot be too frequently emphasised that the Romantic Revival was not a revolt against the methods of ancient classic art; a revolt rather against the poetry which addressed itself exclusively to the intelligence, and which had arisen out of an appreciation of certain qualities of Latin poetry that were readily apparent in it, and characteristic of its peculiar genius. It was a protest raised by the imagination and the emotions. And that protest was first made in the reaction against the heroic couplet, a form specially adapted for the poetry of syllogism and epigram, of satire and dissertation, and almost exclusively employed in the unemotional and unimaginative verse of the time.

All through the eighteenth century was waged the literary controversy between the defenders of the heroic couplet against blank verse and the unconscious forerunners of the Romantic school who attacked it. The value of rhyme was found by Dryden to be, that 'it bounds and circumscribes the fancy. For imagination in a poet is a faculty so wild and lawless, that, like a high-ranging spaniel,

it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment. The great easiness of blank verse renders the poet too luxuriant.'[1] Or in other words, moderation, restraint, regularity, order, what is there in poetry which can compensate for the absence of these? The first poem of any importance after Milton, written in blank verse, was Thomson's *Seasons* in 1726, the next was Young's *Night Thoughts* in 1742. From this time blank verse grew in favour with the more imaginative writers, and with its revival came the revival of the sonnet and some of the earlier English lyrical measures. But the reappearance of the Spenserian stanza as a popular form is a more important indication of the change in taste than any other, and for this reason, that Spenser was looked upon by the orthodox in matters literary during the eighteenth century as *par excellence* the representative of the extravagant and wild, of the Gothic in poetry, an epitome of the qualities to be repudiated by the lovers of true excellence. When moved to praise Spenser or Shakespeare, the critic had to vindicate his possession of good taste by reservations, as did Addison:—

'Old Spenser next, warmed with poetic rage,
In ancient tales amused a barbarous age;
An age that yet uncultivate and rude,
Where'er the poet's fancy led, pursued

[1] Dedicatory Epistle to *The Rival Ladies*, 1664.

> Through pathless fields, and unfrequented floods,
> To dens of dragons and enchanted woods.
> But now the mystic tale that pleased of yore
> *Can charm an understanding age no more.'*

What illumination there is in the complacent phrase, 'an understanding age'! Addison's diagnosis of the character of his times was excellent, but his range of vision did not permit him to foresee that the protest of the future would be raised against the limitations his words unconsciously announce. Time has imported a similar irony into the remark of John Hughes, an early eighteenth-century editor of Spenser—'To compare the *Faerie Queene* with the models of antiquity would be like drawing a parallel between the Roman and the Gothic architecture.'

A number of Spenserian imitations nevertheless appeared in the eighteenth century, and from 1725 to 1750 the Spenserian heresy made considerable progress. Thomson, by his *Castle of Indolence* (1748), increased his claim to attention as a forerunner of the revolution, more especially as he exhibited traces of true romantic feeling, and was not merely engaged, as were the majority of the revivers of the earlier verse forms, in pouring the old wine of conventional sentiment into the new bottles of resuscitated metres. In 1757 Dr. Johnson, the guardian of the sacred Augustan tradition, became

alarmed. The imitators of Spenser waxed numerous, heresy was rampant, and the champion of orthodoxy strode into the arena. In the *Rambler* of May 14, 1757, he wrote: 'The imitation of Spenser by the influence of some men of learning and genius seems likely to gain upon the age.' 'His style was in his own time allowed to be vicious. . . . His stanza is at once difficult and unpleasing; tiresome to the ear by its monotony, and to the attention by its length.' 'The style of Spenser might by long labour be justly copied; but life is surely given us for higher purposes than to gather what our ancestors have thrown away, and to learn what is of no value, but because it has been forgotten.'

One can barely imagine a literary conservatism more complete than that of Johnson; with Pope the end of the world had come, all things were consummated. 'By perusing the works of Dryden, Pope discovered the most perfect fabric of English verse, and habituated himself to that only which he found the best; in consequence of which restraint his poetry has been censured as too uniformly musical, and as glutting the ear with unvaried sweetness. . . . New sentiments and new images others may produce; but to attempt any further improvement in versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and

what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity.'

The imitations of Spenser herald the approaching change in literary fashion, but it is noteworthy that the poets who did the best service in the cause of Romanticism were rather students in the school of Milton than of Spenser, a proof that it was not against classic qualities but against the poetry of mere intelligence that the revolt was directed. Milton was a better scholar than either Pope or Dryden, he modelled his great epics upon the works of the ancient poets: his *Samson Agonistes* is the best example of a drama in the Attic manner that English literature possesses, his *Lycidas* is suffused with memories of the Greek; but for all this the spirit of his poetry was felt to be more romantic than classic, as the eighteenth century understood those terms. But Milton's scholarship enabled him to assimilate the true spirit of the ancients, to learn of them something more than their negative virtues of restraint and discipline and precision, and while preserving these virtues to give at the same time free scope to his imagination. Though he lacks the passion and emotion which the later school of Romance desired, there is no English poetry which more powerfully dilates the imagination; and to his earlier poems Collins and Gray were indebted for the impulse which gave them their place as leaders

in the early stages of the revolutionary movement. The 'longing for a shudder,' which is present in the poetry of the Romantic Revival, presents in an exaggerated form the revolt against the tyranny of convention. But it must not be named as its sole constituent. A poem of Warton's, published in 1740, entitled *The Enthusiast; or the Lover of Nature*, presents another aspect of the new tendency: the fancy for wildness or solitude in landscape, for woods and mountains, ruined castles and twilight groves, such scenes, in short, as might feed the emotions, and stimulate the imagination. 'It may certainly,' as Mr. Courthope says, 'be regarded as the starting-point of the Romantic Revival, as it expresses all that love of solitude and that yearning for the spirit of a bygone age which are especially associated with the genius of the Romantic school of poetry.' Another volume of poems, published in 1746 by Joseph Warton, is avowedly romantic in character. In the preface the author remarks that he looks upon 'invention and imagination to be the chief faculties of a poet, so he will be happy if the following odes may be looked upon as an attempt to bring back poetry into its right channel.' The early poetry of Romanticism, both that of the brothers Warton and their contemporaries, is characterised by a strain of melancholy: a vein of sombre reflection runs through it. Elegies were for

a time a favourite form of composition, and 'graveyard poetry' was not a little appreciated.[1] The following from Warton are characteristic verses:—

'Haste Fancy from the scenes of folly
To meet the matron Melancholy,
Goddess of the tearful eye,
That loves to fold her arms and sigh;
Let us with silent footsteps go
To charnels and the house of woe,
To Gothic churches, vaults and tombs
Where each sad night a virgin comes
With throbbing breast and faded cheek
Her promised bridegroom's urn to seek.'

But 'the whole Romantic school,' as Mr. Lowell wrote, 'in its germ no doubt, but unmistakably foreshadowed, lies already in the *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands.*' This poem, written by Collins about 1750, was not published until 1788, perhaps because it was not thought suited to the spirit of the times, but exhibits even in its title the new literary attitude.—'An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland; *considered as the subject of poetry.*' In praising the Highland superstitions as good subjects for poetry, Collins thus addresses Home, the author of *Douglas*:—

'Fresh to that soil thou turn'st, where every vale
Shall prompt the poet, and his song demand;
To thee thy copious subjects ne'er shall fail;
Thou needst but take thy pencil in thy hand,
And paint what all believe, who own thy genial land.'

[1] *E.g.* Parnell's *Night-Piece on Death*, and Blair's *Grave*, 1743.

Here is the kernel of the whole matter, the conviction that outside the world of reality and common-sense, as represented in polite society and the opinions of cultivated men, as limited by the current philosophy, were to be found subjects adapted for poetic treatment. About the time that Collins was engaged upon this poem, Gray completed his famous *Elegy*. In his earliest poems, he betrays no trace of romantic predilections, the *Elegy* marks an indeterminate period; but in *The Progress of Poetry*, 1754, and *The Bard*, 1757, we see him well on his way towards the camp of the liberals, and in *The Descent of Odin*, 1761, enrolled as a recruit in the rapidly swelling forces of the revolution. How is one to explain Gray's conversion? It may be ascribed without hesitation to the critical movement, which accompanied and supported the new poetic impulse. In 1755 Professor Mallet of Copenhagen published an *Introduction to the History of Denmark*, and in the following year added a volume upon the mythology and poetry of the Celts, and particularly of the ancient Scandinavians. This book marks the awakening of the modern historic sense, the birth of European interest in ancient and mediæval history, and at once exercised a potent influence upon the thought of the day. Gray was profoundly impressed, and when in 1760 *Fragments*

of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language[1] appeared, his adhesion to the cause of Romanticism was sealed. Public taste was ripe for the reception of the work of the antiquarian and poet, and when in 1765 Percy published his famous *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (preceded by *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* in 1763), and in 1770 his translation of Mallet's book, the popular imagination was at once captivated, and the stream was soon running strongly in favour of the Gothic barbarians. In this suddenly awakened interest in the past we have of course one of the chief characteristics of the Romantic movement. The intellectual horizon was immeasurably extended, and as in the Elizabethan age the strange tales brought back by the adventurers of the new world beyond the seas at once aroused and delighted the imagination, so these stories and ballads of a past and forgotten age, the marvels of the northern mythologies recovered by the students of antiquity, stimulated and delighted the more imaginative minds of the eighteenth century, weary of conventional good taste and common-sense. In order to appreciate the electric thrill with which, despite the passionate scorn of Dr. Johnson, Macpherson's *Ossian* was received, it is only necessary

[1] The work of Macpherson, who followed it up in 1762 and 1763 by translations of *Ossian*.

to read, after a few lines of polite eighteenth-century poetry by Pope or some members of his school, a few lines of its vague and suggestive declamations:—

'I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate. The fire had resounded in the halls, and the voice of the people is heard no more. The stream of Clutha was removed from its place by the fall of the walls. The thistle shook there its lonely head; the moss whistled to the wind. The fox looked out of the windows; the rank grass of the wall waved round its head. Desolate is the dwelling of Moina; silence is in the house of her fathers. Raise the song of mourning, O bards! over the land of strangers.'

After Pope's most admired epigrams,

'Tis from high life high characters are drawn:
A saint in crape is twice a saint in lawn,'

how enchanting, too, must have sounded the antique vigour of the ballad,

'The King sits in Dunfermline town,
Drinking the bluid-red wine'!

Mallet's book on the Scandinavian mythology represents the positive side of the critical movement, while Joseph Warton's *Essay on Pope*, published the year following (1756), is representative of its negative side, denying, as it does, to the Augustan poetry the possession of the final virtues.

But the effects of the revolution in taste were not confined to poetry, or even to literature in general. If we turn to Gray's Letters and Journals we shall find sentences breathing new and surprising sentiments.—'In our little journey up to the Grande Chartreuse,' he writes to his friend West, 'I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation that there was no restraining. Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is *pregnant with religion and poetry*.' But if Gray was one of the earliest writers who discovered that mountains were to be admired, Horace Walpole, as has been frequently noted, was 'almost the first modern Englishman who found out that our cathedrals were really beautiful.' During the eighteenth century the classical style in architecture completely predominated. Early in the century the palaces of Blenheim and Castle Howard were erected in it, and the preference gradually led to its adoption for all classes of buildings, public or domestic. Like Percy, Walpole was an enthusiastic antiquarian, and in 1747 made the first attempt in England to revive the Gothic style. The sham battlements of the famous 'Gothic castle,' Strawberry Hill, are a landmark in connection with the birth of modern historical and antiquarian interest. But in 1764 Walpole erected still another Gothic building in his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, which, although like

its predecessor a sham structure, supplied to the novel some of the modern ingredients wanting in the fiction of Defoe. Defoe belonged to the age of prose: a journalist who was in the habit of reporting daily occurrences, and whose stories are merely such reports, differing from those of the newspaper only in this, that they are occurrences that had not occurred. In his narratives there is a marked absence of poetry and sentiment; nor does Pope in his *Essay on Man* better display the spirit of the eighteenth century than Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe*. To the novel Walpole added the vein of heightened emotion desired by the time, and the element of mystery in character and situation. The host of his imitators proclaims the age hungry for sensation. In Miss Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*, Beckford's *Vathek*, Mrs. Radcliffe's *Sicilian Romance* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and in Lewis's *Monk*, the interest is of an intense and agitating character, the scenery wild and suggestive, the characters strange, violent, supernatural. The school of fiction which grew immediately out of the Romantic Revival represents its features in an exaggerated form; true and false Romanticism were not yet distinguished. The appetite was yet too strong to discriminate, or to discern in Strawberry Hill, *Ossian*, or *The Castle of Otranto*, the unreal and the counterfeit element.

At the head of another group of writers who

assisted in the emancipation of the natural life of the feelings stands the author of *Pamela*, and *Clarissa Harlowe*, published in 1748. Richardson's 'Romances of the heart' heralded one aspect of the revolt against the supremacy of the intelligence, and not only vindicated the right of the emotions to legitimate expression, but assigned to them their natural place as guides to conduct and ministers to delight. With Richardson the word 'sentimental,' now fallen to baser uses, meant little more than the cultivation of the feelings. But with Sterne, sentimentalism begins to run to waste, and becomes a prevailing mood which regards emotion as an end in itself, nor cares to determine its appropriate occasions or objects. In Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, published in 1771, we reach the limits of which this style is capable, we assist at the carnival of the sentiments, we learn that there is such a thing as luxury in grief. But while Sterne took advantage of the emotional necessities of the time to trick his readers into tears, a nobler use of its susceptibilities was made by Wesley. A frank supernaturalist, Wesley's triumph by an appeal rather to the emotions than to the reason, affords an important clue to the social and moral needs of his generation. The Romantic movement, indeed, regarded in all its bearings, exhibits the development of the humanitarian out of the political ideal,

a cause in which the notion of a return to nature, promulgated by Rousseau, who visited England in 1766, did so great a service. With that herald of the Revolution a return to nature was a return to a less elaborately organised, a simpler political system, where kings and priests could imprison neither the intellects nor the sentiments of men. But the theories of fraternity and equality which inflamed the enthusiasm of France made no impression upon the colder-spirited islanders. Abstract doctrines sown in English fields send up no terrible crop of armed men. Later in the century, William Blake, born in 1757, stood out boldly in the great cause of liberty and democratic ideals. But Blake as artist and poet represents a later stage in the development of English thought. From boyhood a dreamy mystic to whom visions of angels were familiar, his best artistic work recalls that of Dürer and the mediæval painters; throughout life he believed himself to be guided by ministers from the spiritual world, and he accounts for the greater part of his literary work as communicated to him by the spirit of a dead brother. Blake's singular independence of prevailing fashion, literary and artistic, is hardly matched in the history of our literature. Both as artist and as poet he expresses the life of a later generation, nourished on a more spiritual philosophy, a nobler political and social creed, a poetry

emancipated from the influences of a mechanic age.

No historian of the Romantic Revival could overlook the past played by the writers, like Warton and Hurd, who contributed to the liberalisation of criticism. Warton's *Observations on the Faerie Queene* (1753), and Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, display the conscious side of a movement which was in the main unconscious, or rather they display the effort made by the analytical minds to understand and explain to themselves what the majority were content to feel. Yet it was not from England that the ideals of a criticism which should form part of a universal philosophy first emanated: the shaping ideas of the future issued from Germany, and their history in this country belongs to the early years of the present century. Upon the later history of Romanticism in England, of its association with revolutionary and democratic ideals, I do not propose to enter; that later history, is it not written large that all may read in the poetry of Shelley and of Scott, of Wordsworth and of Coleridge and of Keats, is it not the history of English literature and art in the nineteenth century?

The early Romanticists had a mission to fulfil, and they fulfilled it by saying in effect to the generation to which they belonged, in the words of Hamlet to Horatio, 'There are more things in heaven and earth

than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' It sounded the first few notes of a music which later became orchestral—the music of passion and of triumph, of passion for humanity in its long upward struggle, and of the emancipated imagination which frames for humanity ever new ideals. It opened out of a conventional age a little wicket-gate into a world outside that of our own immediate and circumscribed experience, into a world that we cannot enter unless imagination and faith take us by the hand and make us free of its mysteries, its aspirations, its hopes, its sympathies, and its thoughts 'that do often lie too deep for tears.'

If we would sum up our impressions we may think of the Romantic Revival as the revolt of the natural man against the artificial, the revolt of the imagination and the feelings against the insolent domination of the intelligence in the literature of England from Dryden to Johnson. It displays itself at first by a renewed interest in the works of the older English writers, turning from French models to the imitation of their works, and adopting their metrical forms in the place of the heroic couplet almost exclusively employed by the Augustan poets. It displays itself later by a revival of taste for anything mediæval, for Gothic in preference to classical architecture, by its interest in ancient ballad poetry, fostered by Percy's *Reliques* and similar collections, by its

interest in the early history, the sagas and picturesque mythology of the Scandinavian and of the Celtic races, fostered by various antiquarian works and by the poems of Ossian. It displays itself by a renewed feeling for external nature, more especially in the wilder and more rugged types of scenery which most stimulate the imagination and the emotions. It displays itself by the appearance of a school of critics, a school of poets, a school of Romance writers, a school of novelists, expressing unconsciously or avowedly these predilections.

It would be vain to attempt any classification of latter-day writers which should assign them places in opposing camps. The wizard stream of romance has flowed into the sacred stream of poetry. It is not the poetry that can be most unreservedly labelled Romantic that we find irresistible, but that poetry which is above classification, which, while it excludes nothing that touches humanity from its world of subjects, displays in its expression the exactness, the dignity, the composure, the restraint that we associate with Sophocles or Lucretius, while at its heart burns the passion and the fire of Dante or of Burns. That strain is sometimes heard in the work of the Romanticists, sometimes in the work of the writers we name classical; for it is simply the strain of poetry at its highest reach, the poetry that never fails to tranquillise or satisfy, to whose appeal

in any preoccupation we can never be blind or deaf. Here we may surrender ourselves to the influences that belong to the divine beauty that ever brings consolation if it brings sadness, and can fortify the heart in the presence of Tragedy.

Χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά[1]

THE success of a college like this is sufficient proof, if indeed any proof were required, that the English mind of to-day is keenly alive to the important truth that knowledge is power, is keenly alive to the practical utility of knowledge. It can hardly, I think, be said that there is a present need for any of us to be reminded of the value of knowledge, of the indispensable part it plays in social and individual welfare: we are already convinced of it. We are indeed accustomed daily to congratulate ourselves on the marvellous widening of the horizon of what is known, and on the remarkable spread of general and even special information among the people. We have been led, too, by the writers and speakers upon education, and upon social, economic, and kindred questions for many years past, to expect great things from this increase, and from this spread of knowledge. Mr. Herbert Spencer and other scientific writers have raised

[1] An Address delivered at the opening of the Session 1894-95, in Mason College, Birmingham.

our expectations by their splendid confidence in the diffusion of knowledge, especially a knowledge of science, and have taught us to believe that ignorance is the only serious barrier between the present condition of society and a veritable Utopia. We are all impressed by this view of the latter-day teachers, a great deal can be said for it; and yet some of us are forced to confess that we cannot share their confidence; some of us, perhaps because we are by nature of less sanguine temperament, are disappointed, and are forced to confess our disappointment. The good seed has been diligently sown, but the harvest has not realised our expectations, nor is there any assurance that the future will realise them. We put our trust in education, and we have not found in it, at least in the accepted methods of education, the sovereign remedy for the ills of society. That many and capital results have followed the sowing of the seed it would be idle to deny; capital results are apparent. But there is none the less present with some of us a disheartening sense that all is not well; that the progress we have made, though valuable, is not of the best kind; that we have not followed the *vera lux*, rather allowed ourselves to be led by a bright but erring star. It suffices not that we have learned to have our wits about us, that an edge has been put upon many of our mental faculties, that vast

continents have been added to man's intellectual empire. Even these gains do not suffice; some of us remain unsatisfied, and go about with the query on our lips, 'How comes it that we see knowledge wide, and widening, a multiplication of the arts and sciences side by side with so much that offends the eye, and offends the reason, and offends the heart in our modern civilisation?' The remedy in which we trusted has not penetrated deep enough; the changes that have been brought about are surface changes; and so it comes that our confidence in the absolute efficacy of knowledge has been shaken, and we are now suffering disillusion. The results, too, even in the cases that we should imagine would display this efficacy most triumphantly, often dishearten us still further. How dry and hard, how socially valueless, how intellectually uninteresting, how spiritually barren even the scholar or the man of science too frequently becomes: so much so, that in moments of despondency one is inclined to say hastily that education is a failure, that human nature is not affected by it, or to exclaim, 'How cheap a thing is scholarship when weighed in the scales with pure humanity, with magnanimity, with moral breadth, depth, and simplicity!' Education is not indeed a failure, human nature is disciplined, armed, and inspired by it, if it be education of the right stamp, but

we are suffering disillusion as regards the absolute efficacy of knowledge. Mr. Herbert Spencer and the writers upon education no longer inspire us with their confidence. And it seems probable that we shall be still further disillusioned, and this time more seriously, not merely as regards knowledge, but even the intellectual powers which it nourishes; for in a recent and able work, Mr. Kidd's *Social Evolution*, dealing with the largest social problems, our intellectual supremacy, the intellectual supremacy of the modern world and of the nineteenth century, is very strictly questioned. It appears that we are not nearly so clever as we had imagined ourselves, that the marvellous accomplishments of modern civilisation, upon which we rest our claims of intellectual pre-eminence, are due to small accumulations of knowledge slowly and painfully added by many minds through an indefinite number of generations, and that these minds have not been at all separated from the general average, or even from the minds of other races of lower social development, by any great intellectual interval. And moreover, it is said, and excellent reasons advanced in support of the statement, that it is to ethical and religious, and not at all to intellectual qualities, that the progress of the race must be ascribed. Assuredly knowledge is not everything: it is not everything

to have our wits about us, to have great stores of useful information, to have an edge on the mental faculties. There are other, and perhaps better things, of which our methods of education take little or no account. Our methods of education take account of knowledge, and of the training of certain useful intellectual faculties, for these things have a definite market value. A career is nowadays open to a well-equipped mind, as in old days a career was open to a sharp sword and dexterity in wielding it, and we are thus led to high estimates of the value of knowledge and mental dexterity. People are willing to pay for these things, and we address ourselves in our schools and colleges and universities to the task of imparting knowledge that possesses a market value, and training the faculties that command success.

I do not think that I am here misrepresenting the methods of education we adopt as a nation, and I am anxious, since the privilege has been granted me of addressing you on some subject appropriate to the place in which we are met, I am anxious to ask whether we do right in pursuing exclusively these methods, in prizing so highly knowledge and mental dexterity; and whether we might not find ourselves more nearly right if we were to make certain other powers and attainments the measure of perfection, if we were to recognise

how much of man's life falls outside of the intellectual sphere, and if in our methods of education we were to take into serious account the whole, and not a part only, of human nature; if, in short, we were to recognise what I may speak of as the sovereignty of the heart, as well as the sovereignty of the head.

I am very far indeed from suggesting that it is not an honourable and fitting thing that our education should be made practical and possess a market value, but there are two things we must look to. We must see to it that our education shall result in real and enduring gain to the individual, and in real and enduring service to society. For it is not enough—it is not even wise—to arm the individual with weapons for his personal aggrandisement if you do not at the same time inspire him with an honourable zeal for public ends. Education for the people will not advantage society, it will not advantage the world, if it be not accompanied, as is the discipline and skill of the soldier, with the spirit of loyal attachment to the honour and fortune of the state. A diffusion of knowledge there is that can serve the community. It is knowledge that belongs to a man with catholic aims, a knowledge that clears the mental vision, braces the judgment, but also broadens the imagination and the sympathies, and thus assists in the realisation of the soul.

χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά

The late Mr. Matthew Arnold, in pursuing a parallel line of thought in one of his essays, quotes a sentence from Plato about this matter of education. 'An intelligent man,' Plato says, 'will set store by those studies which result in his soul attaining soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and will count the others of less value.' This talk of the soul, and of soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, in connection with education, is, in modern ears, unfamiliar and startling. Of the soul we hear little in these days, even in theories of education; it is customary to leave affairs of the soul exclusively to the theologians, and perhaps it is not altogether a matter for regret that it has escaped the notice of Mr. Herbert Spencer in his book on education. I should like, indeed, to follow out the line of thought as suggested here, but the soul is to-day so discredited by many accurately informed authors, who know all about the subjects upon which they write, as for example Mr. Grant Allen, the soul is so discredited by these brilliant and trustworthy writers, that one has some diffidence in speaking of it, even on the authority of Plato, and for this reason I shall use the word 'heart' in the phrase you have already heard, the sovereignty of the head, the sovereignty of the heart. I mean by this phrase to express the dual nature of man; a dual nature of which, if they are to be efficient, if

they are to be satisfying, our methods of education must take note. For the little kingdom of man, like the Lacedæmonian state of old, is a city of two kings. The kingship does not belong to the head alone, nor to the heart alone. We are not governed by thoughts, but by thoughts, and instincts, and feelings, and affections. To take full account of the constitution of our natures is to take the first step towards wisely ordered life. To frame our methods of education so that the training, the cultivation given in our schools and colleges may help us towards the realisation of the best that is in us, this is the problem we have to face. But the best that is in us includes much more than a capacity for absorbing vast stores of useful information, and a capacity for acquiring admirable mental dexterity. Our methods, taking no account of the other powers we possess, not recognising the dual sovereignty to which each of us owes allegiance, the sovereignty of the head, the sovereignty of the heart, our methods of education are narrow and faulty.

I stand, indeed, upon a famous battlefield of controversy, but to me it seems clear at all events that of the various needs, instincts, and powers of man, we are to-day losing sight of and neglecting the more pressing, the more serviceable, whether for the individual or society. What we need to-day,

what we desire as a result of education, is not so much knowledge and mental dexterity, we want a sane mental attitude, we want sanity and serenity, we want temper. What I wish to know about the man with whom I am to associate is his mental attitude, his temper. I am not so much concerned with, I do not greatly care to know the number of the languages he has acquired, the number of the sciences of which he is master. These acquisitions on the part of an individual may result in little vital refinement, in little advantage to society. They may be a source of personal satisfaction, they may also be a source of personal gain, but the possessor of them is not always a good citizen, a sure thinker, a man whose companionship is profitable and pleasing. And again, it is not in the power of every man to become a scholar. To become a scholar one must spend one's life with books, and that is a life, not without disadvantages, reserved for the few. But it is in every man's power to become a good citizen, an agreeable companion, to cultivate breadth of judgment, cheerfulness and serenity of temper, to desire and study to obtain moral and intellectual dignity. And not only because all men cannot be scholars, cannot indulge in what Herder called 'the luxury of knowledge,' but for many other reasons also; in the education of the citizen we look to social and ethical qualities,

the qualities that I have tried to sum up as represented by the phrase, the sovereignty of the heart. Mental freedom and receptiveness, moral breadth and sincerity, the interdependence of the mental and moral faculties recognised, these are our needs; or in other words, that there is no vital refinement without character, this is the important truth for us to realise. For 'the moral,' as Emerson says, 'must be the measure of health. If your eye is on the eternal your intellect will grow, and your opinions and actions will have a beauty which no learning or combined advantages of other men can rival.' Or to express it in Plato's words: 'In the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and when seen it is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this world, and the source of truth and reason in the other; and is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life, must have his eye fixed.'

A recognition, then, of the dual sovereignty under which we must live—the sovereignty of the head, the sovereignty of the heart—will assist us as individuals, will assist us as a nation, in pushing forward the progress of the world, and hastening whatever of good the future holds for man. And with quiet minds we may contemplate and await

the future. The course of the world has not yet proved cleverness better than wisdom, and upon the brow of Justice the crown is still inviolate. However long one listens to the voices that praise success on lower planes one is not persuaded. There is no authority in these voices, and the ear of mankind is attune to higher strains. And so it is that we demand more of ourselves, and seek after the best things, and are not satisfied with knowledge and mental dexterity. But our methods of education have set these up as standards of attainment, and it is a noticeable fact that to improve the standard, to raise it, our writers on education and our university men can think of no other expedient than simply to increase the amount of knowledge required, and to make examinations, which are the recognised test of progress in education, more difficult. And we go on increasing the amount of knowledge required in the application of our customary tests, until it is quite marvellous how much the brain of very average intelligence, skilfully treated, will hold, and also quite marvellous how indifferent the power of thought, and how slight the vital refinement that are the result. And thus it seems as if we were almost at a standstill, not knowing where to turn in order to widen our conception of a liberal education, and reduced to continue mechanically raising the standard, as it

is called, by demanding more and more information and greater mental readiness. But there are many of us to be reckoned with who cannot admit that this is in any acceptable sense a raising of the standard, for truly to do so involves much that is not thought of in this process. It involves a realisation of powers in ourselves besides memory, or even high intelligence, powers of imagination, and conduct, and feeling, and sympathy; it involves a recognition of how much of life lies outside the sphere of pure intellect; it involves other measures of attainment than those furnished by examinations, and honour given to different types of character from those to which the crowd does homage. The utilitarian view of education, making livelihood more than life, which has somehow mastered us, is fatal to that ideal of it which includes finer moral feeling, a keener sensitiveness to beauty, a nobler scale of ambition, a choicer growth of affections. Breadth, lucidity, insight, sincerity, harmony, tranquillity, amiableness, magnanimity—these are some of the words I should like to have added to the vocabulary used by our writers and speakers on education. These words carry with them a larger conception of human life, a deeper sense of its meaning and dignity, a deeper sense of beauty, intellectual and moral. How are we to secure in our methods of education such

qualities as breadth, lucidity, insight, sincerity, harmony, tranquillity, amiableness, magnanimity? That is, of course, the difficulty; these qualities are vastly harder of attainment than a goodly amount of knowledge and mental readiness, they dwell in a region wellnigh inaccessible. And there is also the difficulty that even to speak of these things is to be liable to contempt as unpractical. I am well aware how unpractical all this must sound, but fortunately I am not very greatly in awe of what is usually called the practical view of things, though it is a hard matter to persuade people that such a view is not necessarily ripe with the highest wisdom. People not infrequently cloak their dislike to ideas, their incapacity to entertain ideas, by an insistence upon this so-called practical view, which comes to be, as a rule, the traditional, the easiest, and the least complete view, whereas the only really practical view is that which takes in all the facts. Briefly, I think we may say, that if the qualities represented by the words I have just used are desirable, it is not open to us to speak of any effort to attain them as unpractical; and I may say for myself that I am far, indeed, from playing with words, or from speaking with any feeling but one of grave seriousness in this matter. The sad earnestness of modern life forbids trifling, and constrains sincere effort to

see things as they are, and to conceive them as they should be.

One of the chief complaints made against higher education for the people is that it tends to make them dissatisfied, discontented with their place in life, and feverishly anxious to climb to some superior social grade. Education undoubtedly tends to make people discontented, but we may judge of its character by the kind of discontent it brings. The right methods bring discontent with ourselves that we fall so far short, that excellence lies still so far ahead of us. Breadth, lucidity, insight, sincerity, harmony, tranquillity, graciousness, magnanimity: how hard it is even to approach the possession of these qualities! Certainly they are not to be gained in a day, nor even in the twelve terms of a university curriculum, and we must be content if at the end of life we come to see clearly how inestimable they are, if we come to see that honour and fortune and success are already his who has continually before his eyes the vision of their incomparable beauty. If now it were at all possible for our students to gain a sight of these qualities while pursuing their studies, we might still hope for great things from education; our confidence might be renewed.

It will be said that I have strayed too far into the field of philosophy and philosophic ideals. I

would that in the education of the nation we might stray yet further into it, and into the field also of the fine arts. For philosophy is no mere academic study, but the science and art of life itself, and the fine arts do not bear us away into any unreal fairy-land, but in this workaday world are the ministers of beauty and of light, and truths that we cannot spare. So much rests with our attitude towards these and similar influences. The word to the wise is, what we seek we find. These influences are for us exactly what we make them. To take history for example. To some people, said Plunket, the great Irish Chancellor, history is an old almanac; and he went on to say that history written by men without literary cultivation was as unreadable as an old almanac. It rests with ourselves whether history shall be an old almanac, and philosophy a scholastic exercise, and the fine arts an elegant diversion, or whether we shall lay them under higher contribution, and as travellers on these great highways of the world's upward life coming to a clearer knowledge of ourselves, a fuller consciousness of our instincts and needs and powers, at length arrive at our journey's end with justice and truth and beauty in our company, and for our friends those who have loved the light.

In the academy of the world's past the student corrects his impressions of life by a comparison of

them with the impressions of greater minds, his ambitions are enlarged and purified by an estimate of the value of the ambitions that the long centuries have cherished, in his realisation of the world's sorrow his emotions are deepened, in his companionship with its joys his joys are increased, and in his own mingle the elements of universal thought. There is no part of the majestic order of things, there are no harmonies of Nature that may not be shared by him, and there abides continually before him the vision of 'a world unrealised.'

The education we shall learn to prize will be such as serves us in every duty of life, public and private, and in hours of reckoning with ourselves affords us glimpses that continually restore, encourage, and confirm. I should like myself, did it lie in my power, to show what fortifying and consoling glimpses might be the reward of earnest study in the school of letters, for example, the subject in which I am myself specially concerned. Almost any study will, I believe, if properly followed, put an edge upon the intellect; but for the student who looks for more than this the choice is perhaps a narrower one. For my own part, and you will allow that it is natural in me, and so perhaps pardonable, I feel the influences of literature and, let me add, philosophy very strongly,

more strongly than I feel similar influences from other studies. And for one who thinks that 'the whole life of man stands in need of grace and harmony,' there can hardly be a wiser choice than literature and philosophy among the various studies to which a student may apply himself.[1] Not that it need be an exclusive study. There is too much made of what is called the 'conflict of studies'; we cannot afford to neglect any opportunity to enlighten or to enlarge our minds. No man, indeed, can make himself master of all branches of knowledge, or even of any one branch; but to profit by a study it is fortunately not imperative that it should be mastered in its entirety. You may make some profitable acquaintance with the results at least in many departments of science, though your direct path lies otherwhere; your friendship with Plato, or Dante, or Shakespeare will make no impossible demand upon your time, nor can it weaken your grasp in the region of mathematics or geology.

It seems curiously difficult for the average human mind to entertain more than one idea at a time, and we are not yet safe from attacks upon literature, and the study of literature, by men of science, and attacks upon science, and the value of

[1] I should like, with Professor Dowden, to see the student pass four years in *a School of Philosophy and Letters*.

science, by men of letters. But I think we are now nearly safe, and that in this college the English feeling of to-day is represented, where science and literature are sworn allies, and have buried deep the weapons of their former warfare. It has indeed frequently been shown that the study of literature is itself a science, and it is to be remembered that in some sense the man of science is also a student of literature, for he is a student of our most ancient document. In its broadest meaning, all that is preserved in writing—*litera*, the written or printed thing—includes much more than books. That great living being, the world, as the Stoics feigned it, wrote its pre-human history in the beds of rivers, in the hieroglyphics of ice-worn or fire-fused rock, in the debris of primæval forests, and in the mammoth skeletons of its earliest inhabitants. This is the literature in which the geologist, the palæontologist, is versed. And even that god-like person, the pure mathematician, who lives upon the delights of abstract quantities and the relations of things at infinity, is a reader of the literature of curves and angles supplied in the book of Nature.

Let us suppose, then, that a student is in quest of breadth, lucidity, insight, sincerity, harmony, tranquillity, graciousness, magnanimity—shall we promise him many near glimpses of these in the school of letters? I think we may certainly so

promise. We may not indeed say that these glimpses are not to be had elsewhere, we may even affirm the contrary, for there are many schools of intellectual, moral, and social discipline. But we may say that he will do well here, that here life may be strengthened, sustained, and consoled, quickened with the love of truth and the love of beauty, and made bright with memories of the best human traditions. And though I have no right to speak upon any aspect of the study of science, I shall venture the opinion that he will do well here also, that in the study of Nature and her laws there is room for the discipline we seek. For once more it is what we seek we find, and Nature has her own breadth, and sincerity, and harmony, and tranquillity, and graciousness.

'And with joy the stars perform their shining,
And the sea its long moon-silvered roll,
For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul.

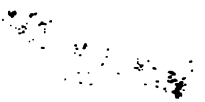
Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

Bounded by themselves, and unregardful
In what state God's other works may be,
In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
These attain the mighty life you see.'

You will permit me in conclusion to quote some

words of my own, addressed not long since to students of my own college. If it be asked what is the final end of education, we may say that towards the effort to improve our own selves so that we may the more effectively assist our fellows, our best guides direct us, in this is the purest happiness given us to enjoy. It frees each day and hour of our little journeying beneath the sun from the sense of its paltry vanity that so often and so sharply afflicts the heart. The remembrance of that endeavour will be ours upon the threshold of the future when our eyes grow dim to the sunlight, and the veil of Isis is raised for each of us.

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